

Lazy Dungeon Master: Volume 8

Supana Onikage

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Supana Onikage

Illustrator: Youta

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Prologue

Ichika was Keima's slave. She had served him and his dungeon ever since he bought her at Docosp's Slave Market in Tsia.

Keima was the Dungeon Master of the [Cave of Greed]. Rokuko was the Dungeon Core in human form, and Niku was a slave that began serving the dungeon before Ichika. The dungeon consisted of four people after Keima bought Ichika, with her included.

Before long, Ichika was working at the Dancing Doll Inn, which Keima built near the entrance to the dungeon. Keima had come from another world (Japan) and didn't know how her world worked. Rokuko was a sheltered Dungeon Core and likewise knew nothing, whereas Niku was a child who had been a slave since birth. Therefore, Ichika ended up being a valued member of the dungeon who was relied upon by her allies. Even as more people joined the dungeon, Ichika's position remained firm.

Honestly, Ichika's knowledge of the world was a bit shaky — she did end up a slave after amassing a huge gambling and food debt — but still, she knew she was a bit odd and actively kept her advice grounded in reality.

Anyway, once again, Ichika was working as the inn receptionist. It was a simple job where one mostly just had to hand over keys to visitors. Some visitors would try squabbling over prices or such, but the golems would take care of them without much fanfare. Most squabbling visitors were cheap adventurers, and they would get real obedient real quick after seeing the Adventurer's Guild seal on the golems.

Even handling money for inn fees and food was done largely by the register that Keima had made. It could hardly be considered a job really, since all it required was sitting around all day.

If someone tried to haggle, they were given a flat no and told to leave. End of story. The inn's strength was that it would be just fine even if nobody was staying there. Reason being, it was just a front that Keima ran while working as a Dungeon Master in the background, but... from Ichika's perspective, she was curious why he kept up with the inn at all when he was also the pope of Beddhism and the town chief. Maybe he just enjoyed it, or maybe he had complex plans that went beyond anything Ichika could imagine.

.....He probably just hadn't realized that he could quit working

at the inn.

And well, working as the inn receptionist was such an easy-going non-job that it afforded Ichika the time to think about silly things like that. It was so simple that even the hardest workers in the inn would push their shifts onto each other to avoid doing it themselves. They were always so happy when Ichika said, “Don’t sweat it dude, I’ll take care of it for ya.” Which was why Ichika, who aimed to please, was working as the receptionist on that fateful day.

“Welcoome.”

A wolf beastkin that strongly resembled a bipedal werewolf opened the door to the inn, and froze. His eyes widened as if he was shocked about something.

“...Sir? You’re gonna get in everyone’s way if you stand in the door, could you do me a solid and come in already?”

“Sorin?!” The beastkin exclaimed.

Ichika jumped a little at hearing her old name, the name she’d lost after being enslaved, for the first time in a long time.

“Ahhhh, sorry bro, I’m super bad with faces. Especially wolf beastkin faces, you dig? Do I owe you some cash? Nah, no way, all that debt went away when I got enslaved.”

“No, come on! It’s me! I — wha, don’t tell me you forgot who I am!”

It was then that Ichika realized. Perhaps he was trying to scam her by pretending to be an extended family member, a scam that Keima had warned her about. Thankfully, Keima also told her how to deal with that scam.

“Please leave, I don’t have a son.”

“Wha?! Who said anything about that?! I’ve been worried sick, looking for you ever since I heard you got enslaved and sold to some merchant... Gaah, come on, it’s me! Isam, your old party member!”

Ichika tilted her head in confusion. The Isam she knew and had partied with was much smaller, much cuter, and much fluffier. That said, it had been many years since she last saw him, and now that she took a closer look, he did kind of look like him...

“Yeah, I know a wolf beastkin named Isam, but he wasn’t all tough and wild like you. Gotta be someone else.”

“...Y-You messing with me?! I’m him! I’m definitely him!”

“Yeah, you totally just stammered there. You stammered, dude. Sorry, but you’re not gonna be scamming me. Who’re you, really? Why’re you pretending to be an old party member? Depending on your answer I might just have to beat the fur off you, bro.”

“Man, you haven’t changed at all... Ah. But I guess I have. Must be hard to recognize me now that I’m taller and my voice’s deeper...” Isam’s wolf tail hung sadly.

“First of all, dude, you shoulda done better research. Isam’s got a little sis, you know. You were doomed the second you came on your own.”

“Mimiko’s outside doing her own thing! I said I’d get a room for us!”

“Hm. So you learned about her but couldn’t find a girl to act out the role?”

“Why would you ever think that?!”

Ichika was grinning hard as she teased Isam. At which point a new visitor arrived.

“Isam?! Stop, don’t be mean to the inn workers! Sorry miss, please forgive my brother!” The new visitor, another wolf beastkin with thick beast blood, seemed to be Isam’s little sister. She hurriedly rushed forward and bowed repeatedly after seeing Isam leap for the receptionist desk.

“Oh, Mimiko!” said Ichika with a grin. “Look at how big you’ve gotten. How’re things, my girl?”

“Huh?” The new visitor... Mimiko lifted her head.

“S-Sorin! I-Is that really you?”

“The one and only, dude. Glad to see you’re as cute and fluffy as ever, Mimiko. Mmnnmnnn.”

“Ahahaha, g-geez, Sorin. I’m not a kid anymore...” Mimiko and Ichika exchanged a friendly hug over the counter. Seeing that, Isam walked over to join in, but Ichika shooed him away.



“Who the heck are you? Get outta here.”

“No, it’s me, Isam! Your old party member! Mimiko’s brother, Isam!”

“Mimiko, girl, lay it on me. Is this dude telling the truth? For real?”

“I-It’s really him, Sorin.”

“Alrighty, I believe it. I’d trust you with my life, Mimiko.”

“Feeling a little disrespected here, Sorin.” Isam shook his head while Ichika cackled. They really did go way back.

“But anyways, you two staying here? It’s fifty coppers a night each, but the onsen’s free. Check the menu over there for deets on the food,” said Ichika while pointing at a menu on the receptionist counter. Normally she’d explain the prices and help them find the best one for their needs, but not this time. “Y’know, Mimiko, I feel like celebrating us finding each other. Have a C-Rank meal on me.”

“What?! Th-That’s too much. It says those cost five whole silvers, Sorin!”

“Dooooon’t sweat it. Here, Mimiko, your food ticket.” Ichika gave her a food ticket for free. Five silvers was equivalent to fifty thousand yen or so, but Ichika was paying for the price of materials, not the meal itself — and even with Kinue hand-making each meal now, the high quality meat and stuff could be bought in bulk for cheap with DP. She could give food tickets away for practically free. At most, she would owe Keima five DP or so. That wasn’t even the price of a single goblin, which was 20 DP. (As an aside, Ichika was wasting all of her actual paycheck on slot machines and curry rolls.)

“I gotta back this food up too, it’s the real deal!”

“Seriously? It must be pretty good if you’re recommending it, Sorin. Looking forward to it,” said Isam with a grin, only to have Ichika glare at him.

“Back off, bud. I’m only treating Mimiko here. Use your brain for a second.”

“...That side of you hasn’t changed either, Sorin.” Isam couldn’t help but laugh at how unchanged Ichika’s attitude was. She had given Mimiko special treatment since before being enslaved, back when she was an adventurer going by the name Sorin.

“Still though, what really happened back then? You left the party outta nowhere, and next thing we heard you got enslaved and sold to a merchant. We’ve been looking for you ever since.”

“Ahhh, well. Lots of stuff happened, y’know, this and that.”

“Anyway, looks like you ended up getting free. That’s a huge relief... Let’s form another party and get back to adventuring!”

“Hold it, bro. Check this out.” Ichika held her chin up and pointed

at the slave collar around her neck. It served as unmistakable proof that she was someone else's property.

"That collar... Damnit, you're still a slave!"

"Yuppers. Oh, and I'm going by Ichika now instead of Sorin, so yeah, do me a solid and switch over."

"I can't believe an adventurer like you is being forced to work in a place like this, Sorin!"

"Hey, it happens. And what'd I just say? I'm Ichika now." Ichika repeated herself, but Isam wasn't even listening anymore.

"Dammit! It's gotta be some merchant enslaving you here, right?! Sorin, I'm gonna save you! No matter what!" Isam slammed a fist on the table and gave Ichika a fiery look of determination. But she on the other hand looked at him with cold, unmoved eyes.

"Nah, give it up. Don't get in over your head here."

"I'll buy you back and get that collar off you!" Isam said before rushing out of the inn.

"...What's he planning? Hey, Mimiko, did Isam get rich or something?"

"Umm... We both got to C-Rank ourselves, and we've been saving money to buy you back, so maybe that's what he means, Sorin... ah, Ichika." Although she seemed to feel a little awkward about it, Mimiko switched to calling Ichika by her current name instead of Sorin.

"You're a good girl, Mimiko. The thing is, I'm feeling pretty alright with how things are right now, so I kinda don't want you two doing anything here. Make sure Isam hears that loud and clear. Also, tell him I'll ignore him if he calls me Sorin again, alright?"

"Okay, I will, S... Ichika!"

"Aaah, Mimiko, you're such a goood good giiirl!" said Ichika while hugging Mimiko tightly again, her large chest burying the wolf girl's face and encouraging her to take a sniff. She wagged her tail at Ichika's nostalgic smell, which was the same... no, which was just a little different than it used to be.

"Woof. Um... You smell kinda more tasty than before, I think? Kinda spicy...?"

"Ah, that's probably the curry rolls. Had some for lunch today. Bro, it's like, totally the best bread I've ever had in my life. I eat it every day and never get tired of it!"

"If the Food Monster herself is saying that, it must be some pretty amazing stuff."

"Hahaha! Hey, I'll let you try some tomorrow, sound good?" Ichika smiled as she rubbed Mimiko's head, in a good mood. She went ahead and gave her a room key.

"See you later, Ichika!"

“Yep, seeya! Alriiight... Guess I better tell Master about this.” With all that done, Ichika swapped shifts with Hanna — one of the Silky triplets, who was sweeping a hallway — and went right to reporting the situation to Keima. Given the time, he was probably in his town chief office, adding onto the Beddhist bible.

“...And that’s what happened. Some of my old party members are here and they’re all about trying to free me from slavery.”

“I see. Well, I’ll deal with them if they come asking for me.”

Keima gave an instant, casual reply while continuing to write in the bible. Hard to expect much else when they hadn’t done anything yet, after all.

“By the way, just asking ’cause I can, how much would they have to pay for you to free me?” asked Ichika, curious.

“Hm?” Keima stopped writing a moment and looked up in thought. “Eh... I might think about it for a second if they offered 50,000 golds or more, but no matter the price, I’m never gonna let you go.”

“Squee! That’s like a thousand times more than normal and you’d still turn ’em down, huh? Gotta say, Master, you’ve got some big dick energy.”

“Pretty sure I said this before, but you know too much about the dungeon for me to let you go free. You think I’d let you go and suffer the sleepless nights that’d cause?”

“Ahaha, point taken, dude.” Ichika responded to Keima’s joking tone with a laugh. “Yup yup, guess I’m gonna be serving you for the rest of my life, Master. But hey, as long as I get to fill my belly with curry rolls, you won’t hear me complaining.”

“Yep, loyalty is rewarded.” Keima tossed a curry roll in Ichika’s direction. A payment for her report.

“Squee, I love you sooo much, Master! Anyway, back to work for me. Later.” Ichika returned to the receptionist desk in a good mood.

Apparently, Isam had gone to the Dyne Company in search of Ichika’s master, which meant heading to the main office in Pavella. Even though Dyne himself was living in Goren at the moment. Ichika found herself reminded of the importance of accurate information.

Chapter 1

This is a bit sudden, but I decided to modify the Dungeon Boss.

I've had the idea for a while now. A grand plan for a Dragon Golem, stirring in my mind. I tried making weapons for the Haniwa Golem with magic tools, but dungeon objects and traps were generally more powerful than whatever effects the magic tools had. [Water Sources] were better at making water, [Flamethrowers] were better at making fire, and by using those objects and traps, we unlocked more powerful versions of them.

There were plenty of options for us at the [Cave of Greed], even though we didn't use traps from the DP catalogue much... *Oh? Looks like we can customize traps now. Pretty sure that wasn't an option before. Though the only thing we can customize is the trap's area of effect, and only by a little bit.*

Anyway, since I couldn't place traps in the Master Room (given that it was inside the Dungeon Core), I experimented with them in the Boss Room. First, I tried seeing if I could place traps on golems. I brought an Iron Golem to the Boss Room, opened the catalog, and... discovered that I could not. The golem wasn't an option on the menu. Next.

Placing traps on walls was just standard stuff, so I turned an Iron Golem into a solid iron ingot. I then flattened it, stuck it to the wall, and tried placing a trap on the wall. *[Water Source] should be fine for now... Wait, that'll get the room wet. [Flamethrower] it is.*

Unfortunately, the end result was just fire shooting out from the wall and getting blocked by the layer of iron over it. *Dang, there goes that idea. If only this worked. I could've put [Flamethrowers] on statues. Or maybe it's just that using an Iron Golem as a base was a mistake? Well, at the very least, I can use this technique to make a sauna.*

Suddenly, I noticed the Interior tab on the DP Catalog. Within were all sorts of decorations and such. The word interior must have been short for interior decoration. I never noticed since I had been making all the decorations manually, but there were all sorts of stuff there. Pillars, walls, statues... Wait.

I bought a random stone statue (100 DP) from the catalog, and in front of me appeared a statue of a goblin wielding its sword aggressively. Five goblins worth of DP for a single stone statue. Normally, that'd be a complete waste of DP. But in a shocking twist, I

could place traps on the stone statue. It seemed that items from the Interior tab were considered as part of the dungeon, and thus could be trapped. It was pretty weird seeing a [Flamethrower] launch fire out of a goblin's chest.

I used {Create Golem} on the stone statue to alter its form. Traps stopped working when the location it was placed on shifted too much, so the [Flamethrower] stopped shooting flames by the time the statue was in the shape of a simple tube. Apparently, the trap was treated as being destroyed at that point.

I experimented with using DP to repair the trap. Conveniently, that did the trick. Fire spewed from the tube, just as planned. *Neat, now I have a portable flamethrower.*

With that done, I knew traps could still be used after having their shape changed. That was a big step forward. I could put the tube inside the mouth of the Dragon Golem, for instance.

...Ah, but looks like I can't place new traps after using {Create Golem} on stuff. That's a pain. All I can do is fix existing ones. Not to mention that the tube was so thin, the fire wrapped over the tube itself, covering it from all sides. I would've been badly burned if I was holding it. *That was close.*

For [Flamethrowers] anyway, I needed to customize the AOE to shrink it down, ideally to about thirty centimeters in diameter. I could only customize the traps while placing them, so I would need to be very careful when making things.

I also noticed another flaw. The flamethrower stopped working once I left the Boss Room to show it off. But then it started working when I went back to the Boss Room. Further investigation revealed that traps only worked on the same floor that they were initially placed on. Key point being floor, not room.

The reason probably lied in traps ultimately being things placed into the dungeon. They could move within the dungeon since it was probably expected for traps to be used in puzzles and such that might cover a whole floor. It stopped working the moment I left the Boss Room since I had put it on its own floor, so I could place monsters within it in the case of an emergency. It made sense, given that you couldn't place monsters or traps on a floor with invaders on it, but to think that'd come back to bite me here. It was a pain, but I would just have to remember that traps would only work on their own floor. No taking them elsewhere.

But in any case, the experiments were overall a success. I could make new kinds of golems equipped with a plethora of traps, as long as I kept these restrictions in mind. *Alright, let's take this opportunity to use a bunch of different traps and see if any achievements get unlocked. That'll end up using a lot of DP, but hey, you gotta do what you gotta do.*

Heck yeaah, time to go all out and make a fire breathing Dragon Golem, yeaah. Woooo.

* * *

Anyway, this is a bit sudden, but I decided to modify the dungeon. The dungeon had more or less stabilized recently. You could say that it had found a niche and exploited it to a more than satisfactory extent. We didn't need to add anything new, people were already satisfied just to hunt the Iron Golems. Most people never felt the need to go any deeper. So, what did that mean for us?

"I think I'm going to modify the [Cave of Greed] one last time, then consider it finished."

"...Finished?" Rokuko, who I had called over to discuss this, tilted her head. From Rokuko the Dungeon Core's perspective, the [Cave of Greed] was just part of herself, and the idea of "finishing" it didn't even make sense. I reframed the idea with a different choice of words.

"I mean, I want to put the dungeon in a state where it no longer needs to be added to, ever. Like straight-up nobody is bothering to go deep inside the dungeon, so we might as well make a Dungeon Goal and leave the [Cave of Greed] on its own. I get the feeling that unnecessarily making deeper floors will just lead to stronger adventurers coming."

"Makes sense. It does seem like really deep dungeons attract people that would be difficult to deal with. So, okay. What did you mean by Dungeon Goal?"

"It's basically just a Core Room with a Dummy Core, but with a really fancy design that yells, 'This is it! You've won!'" I drew a simplified map of the dungeon so Rokuko could see what I meant. The map could have done the same thing, but my drawing was focused on being clear and easy to explain.

Starting from the entrance. First there was the entrance area where normal goblins show up, then there was the labyrinth area, then there was the Puzzle Area (or at least its wreckage), then the spiral staircase area, then the storeroom area, and then, a four way split.

Split one led to the magma area of our neighboring dungeon, the [Flame Caverns]. Split two led to the plains area I had created experimentally, which looked like it was outside but in reality you just couldn't see the walls. Split three led to the coliseum, Boss Room, and the Dungeon Core with the Dummy Core. And finally, split four led to the new Puzzle Area I had made using the puzzles from the original area.

We actually had two Core Rooms with Dummy Cores: one behind the Boss Room and one behind the new Puzzle Area. Also, I had

stealthily made Neruneh's laboratory behind the Boss Room, and the Core Room behind the Puzzle Area had a hidden layer hiding the Dummy Core.

"H-Hold on, Keima. It's super embarrassing for you to just draw me out like that!"

"Huh? What're you talking about, Rokuko?" Rokuko was fidgeting in embarrassment for some reason. What had gotten into her?

"Well, I mean, that's my dungeon... It's like you just drew me without any clothes on. Wh-Why wouldn't I be embarrassed? Keima, you pervert."

Ahhh. Right, Rokuko's a Dungeon Core. And the dungeon is like her body in a way, so yeah, drawing her naked. Not that this drawing would ever turn me on or anything.

"W-Well, I don't mind if it's you, Keima, buuut... Try not to do it too much, okay?"

"Alright, that's enough of this. I'm erasing it."

"Ah, w-wait. Y-Your drawing was really good. Just what I'd expect from you, Keima! Does that make you feel better?"

"Haha, yeah, those compliments don't mean much to me." I erased the map and just described each area with words. That probably wouldn't embarrass her. If it did, well, I was out of options.

"...By the way, does the menu map not embarrass you?"

"Mmm, not really. It does feel like my stomach's being looked into, though."

So like an MRI photo or something like that. Yeah, that's definitely on a different level from simple embarrassment.

"Anyway, I'm continuing."

"Right."

At the moment, normal adventurers were reaching the storeroom area. Nothing before it really needed changes. Which meant the problem lied in the four branch points.

"First of all, I'm going to combine the two Core Rooms into one." Which meant removing the Core Room behind the Puzzle Area. Naturally, I wouldn't just be destroying it, I'd be moving the Dummy Core out of it. In return, I would put some rare items in its place: a gold-covered Golem Blade and a ruby Beddhist holy symbol. That would also let me explain how I was finding rare items that nobody else was.

That left the Core Room behind the Boss Room. First of all, I put a sign in the hallway leading to the Core Room that said, "Beyond this point is the Core Room. Proceeding is prohibited by Laverio law. Signed, Town Chief Keima."

"...Hm? Should you really be putting that there?"

"Well, any good-hearted adventurers will turn back once they see

that the Core Room is up ahead. Even if they sneak a peek inside, there's nothing there but the actual Core Room, so they'll see the sign was right and leave anyway." And then, a not so good-hearted adventurer would get suspicious, explore the room, and find the hidden door.

Through it was the innermost area. It would be filled with traps, and any who survived the onslaught would reach another Core Room. This time it was the real Core Room with no hidden doors... or at least, that's how it would look. One of the pitfalls on the way to the Core Room would have a secret passageway which led to the hidden innermost area.

"Okay, Keima. Can I say something?"

"Sure."

"...This is like, really complicated!"

"Yeah, that's the idea. The first Core Room is the 'goal' for most adventurers, and the second Core Room in the innermost area is for the more villainous adventurers. Understand now?"

"Mmm, so basically, you're spamming a ton of Dummy Core rooms."

"Yeah, more or less." The main problem we faced was someone like the High Priestess coming over with the intention of destroying the Core, but they would just leave and be satisfied after destroying the Dummy Core. *I sure hope that satisfies them.*

"Ah, but what will we do for Dungeon Battles?"

"We can just use the [Ivory Beach] again. It is a dungeon we made just for a Dungeon Battle, after all."

"Mmm, well, that's true. Okay, let's go through with those changes then, Keima."

"Nice. Time to get this done so I can get to sleep." I pumped my fist to boost my morale. Though in the end, golems would be doing most of everything.

* * *

So, I wanted to go ahead and make the changes I discussed with Rokuko, but... After some thought, I remembered something very dangerous and very relevant to dungeon reconstruction.

"...What should I do about Suzuki?"

Indeed, Suzuki the Hero. He was still buried alive in one of our walls. I honestly had kind of forgot about him, but he was indeed still alive in the wall, providing a valuable source of daily DP for us. *{Ultra Healing} sure is scary. Maybe he should be called Suzuki the Living Wall now.*

He was located deep within the storage room area, but it was possible that some careless reconstruction work might cause the wall

to crumble and free him. That would be very inconvenient, to say the least.

“...I guess for now, I should move him somewhere that nobody will ever go.” Since my goal here was *finishing* the dungeon, it would be important to seal him completely in the deepest part of the dungeon. Moving that chunk of wall would probably be quite the task. Dungeon functions don’t let you move walls, so.

Anyway, I went and brought Ichika to the front of the Suzuki Wall (which I had just named).

“So, what’re we gonna do about this, dude?”

“I figured this might happen a long time ago, by which I mean minutes ago, and made a golem specifically for this purpose. Whaddaya think?” I had made a Construction Golem, and it was like a human-shaped mech that humans could climb into and use like power armor. “It’s a Construction Golem. I call it a Daiframe. You can get inside and pilot it.”

“Oooh!”

It was a simple golem that just mimicked the movements of the one piloting it. Height-wise it was two meters tall. The frame itself was indeed just a frame with a minimal amount of armor, leaving the pilot mostly exposed. Reason being, it was meant for construction, not combat. Visibility was important. I covered it with a layer of orichalcum for sturdiness, though that just meant it ended up needlessly strong and shiny. *Where does the name come from? Dai means big in Japanese, so Daiframe means big frame. Got a problem with that?*

“Can’t you just like, let golems take care of it? Or just use golem assistance?”

“Nah. I don’t want to rely on golems since they won’t be able to react if something unexpected happens, and golem assistance can actually make doing precise work like this harder.” We were carrying a huge chunk of wall with extremely dangerous contents (a human). I had shaved off the surrounding walls, which left it as a cube with two-meter dimensions. I was afraid that shaving off any more would let Suzuki smash out of the wall. There wasn’t any point in trying to shave off as much wall as possible in some kind of game of chicken, so if that cube could be carried, that would be for the best.

“...Y’know, is this Daiframe even gonna be strong enough?”

“Should be. I used a solid third of the orichalcum from that sword Rokuko’s dad gave me. If the golem’s not strong enough, just say so. I’ll add some more. Pretty sure that won’t happen, though. I did the math.” I had tested the strength of orichalcum ahead of time.

“Mmm. Kay, but why me?”

“You’re the best fit for this. You basically never get movement

help from the golem assistance, right?”

The Wearable Golems I made covered the body and provided assistance in two different ways. The first was movement help, where the golem would move your body for you. This was helpful for letting it walk you to your destination or recreate sword skills. The second type was power assistance, where the golem added its strength to your movements. It enhanced the wearer’s abilities without replacing them.

Motion assistance was useful during combat since your body would move properly no matter what, but you had to teach the golem what to do ahead of time. It wasn’t much different from instructing golems to do manual labor. Me, Rokuko, and most of those working for the dungeon relied heavily on motion assistance, whereas Niku and Ichika generally used the power assistance to improve their existing fighting styles.

“But still, shouldn’t you be using it, dude? You made the thing.”

“I need to be standing at the ready if Suzuki breaks out. I’ll walk up to him, say ‘I came to save you,’ then stealthily unsheathe Siesta and put him to sleep so I can build a wall over him in the same position he was in before.”

“Holy crap dude, that’s evil.”

“He’ll probably think he was just dreaming or something. It’s possible that he might suffocate while asleep, but well, that just means he’ll be off our back.” Either way, the most convenient thing would be the wall transportation going well.

“Got it. So, why me instead of Niku?”

“You’re bigger. In terms of minimizing risk, the closer the pilot is in size to the golem the better, and you’re a good fit for it.”

“Got it. Kinda wish you gave some time to practice, though. Starting me off with this real deal junk is kinda spooky, y’know?”

That was fair. Which was why I had her practice operating the Daiframe while I was off doing other work.

And in the end, she did her job flawlessly.

“Felt kinda nice, like I got taller all of a sudden. Didn’t feel weird moving it at all, to be real.” She successfully moved the Suzuki Wall to deeper into the dungeon. It now rested safely in the secret innermost Core Room hidden beneath the trap area. All that was left was burying the Suzuki Cube deep in a wall and building over it. That would be Rokuko’s job.

“By the way, wouldn’t it have been, like, way safer if you took advantage of Rei’s zero attack power here?”

“...Oh!” Ichika dropped a bombshell as she climbed out of the Daiframe. *Yeah... Rei’s zero attack power is perfect for carrying delicate stuff around. Though I haven’t tested if it’ll still take effect when she’s piloting the Daiframe.*

“Uh, I mean, that wouldn’t mean much if she dropped the wall when carrying it. You were definitely the best pick for this, Ichika. Definitely. Yeah.”

“Kay, let’s leave it at that.”

And so, the dungeon modifications ended safely. No problems! Everything went fine!

...L-Look, all’s well that ends well, okay? Okay.

A Piece of Garbage’s Perspective

A pair of lovers arrived at Goren, both C-Rank adventurers. The woman was named Peesa and the man Garbo. Peesa and Garbo found great joy in hunting those weaker than themselves. The term hunt, of course, referred to murdering people and stealing all their belongings. They loved it partially for the fun of it and partially for the profit.

But mostly the former.

The majority of their targets were rookie adventurers, or at the most those who had gotten a knack for adventuring. Ignorance bred negligence — there was no prey easier to hunt than rookies with their eyes solely on the prize. That said, the best part of rookies was their youth. They tended to be poor, but they could be enjoyed in... other ways.

To sum things up, Peesa and Garbo were pieces of garbage.

They had been briefly living in Pavella, but fled for Goren to escape the music after playing around too much. They tried to keep the murders to two, three parties per city. But it wasn’t a big deal for them, honestly. They just went with the wind wherever it took them.

“So, Darling. What’s our next move?”

“Mmm, y’know, Honey. I was thinking we should start by finding a party of young people to join.” Their *modus operandi* was to find a party of at most three rookie adventurers, teach them various things to earn their trust, then kill them. Sometimes they took their time over several days, sometimes they got impatient and attacked on the first day.

Three was the largest party they’d go for due to how conveniently the math worked out. They could kill one of them with a surprise blow, then take another as a hostage while they had their fun with the third one. At times they would kill two at once, and at other times they would use poison to paralyze all three then gradually kill them one by one, but either way, their rule was to always have fun in various ways before killing them all off. Forgive me for sparing you the details of said fun.

In any case, their search for convenient prey brought them to Goren. It was the location of an easy dungeon well suited for

beginners, after all, and the Iron Golem trade led to a lot of people going in and out of the town. There weren't many guards since it had been so recently established. It would be hard to find a better place for criminals to hide themselves.

From their perspective, Goren had a lot of tasty prey, they wouldn't stick out among the flow of newcomers, and by killing in the dungeon they could save themselves the effort of hiding the corpses. The more they learned about Goren, the more they wanted to go there. They even began to consider it a town made just for them.

When they arrived, they first went to the Guild branch office. Putting aside the more veteran adventurers there to hunt golems, there were a fair number of tasty-looking rookies. They wanted to begin the hunt immediately, but first came learning about the dungeon. They would need to ask for a map and search for corridors and rooms off the beaten path. In other words, places to have fun.

The two of them split up before beginning their reconnaissance. Garbo would gather information on their hunting grounds, whereas Peesa would engage with their future prey.

Of the two counters in the Guild, Garbo went to the one with a less experienced-looking receptionist behind it. He had no ulterior motive, the other receptionist was just busy. He took out his C-Rank guild card and spoke politely to the receptionist.

"Heya, miss. Do you have a map of the dungeon here?"

"Yes, but only of the first floor. It will cost five coppers to look at it, or ten coppers to buy it."

"Just the first floor, huh?" He paid eleven coppers. The extra was a tip. Still, five coppers was pretty cheap for looking at an information source as valuable as a map. That meant the first floor probably wasn't very large. What was up with the second floor and below?

"The second and third floors are impossible to map as they are labyrinths with frequently changing walls and paths. We know which direction the next staircase is in, but rarely is reaching it a simple task."

"Oh...?"

"If you would like a map showing only the position of the stairs and the location of set traps, it will cost ten coppers to look at it. Thirty to buy." This time he paid thirty coppers for the map. It was drawn on high quality paper and showed the general perimeter of the floor, the rooms projecting from the side, and the location of the floor. In one of the projected rooms there was a mark signifying special attention.

"What's with this room? Looks like it's both trapped and a Safe Zone."

"It is known as the greed trap. For starters..." She answered his

question promptly, as the information was not gated behind a fee. But it should have been written on the map in the first place, spat Garbo on the inside.

The entire room was in fact part of the trap. There was a Magic Blade stuck into a pedestal, and the room would be sealed shut when it was pulled out. But the seal would undo if the blade was returned to the pedestal. Only those too greedy to give up the Magic Blade would end up stuck.

...Garbo couldn't hold back a grin after hearing that. It was like a room they could lock in the dungeon. Or in other words, they could do whatever they wanted inside of it without getting caught. There was probably no better place in the town to *play*.

"Alright, thanks. Guess I'll go check the dungeon out."

"Be careful."

Garbo, having gotten more than enough information from the receptionist, ended the conversation and met up with Peesa, who had been talking to other adventurers.

"How'd it go, Honey? Learn anything fun?"

"Oh yes, Darling. I just saw a rich-looking avian child register as an adventurer with an attendant and a dog beastkin slave."

"Interesting. Any good men in that bunch?"

"All women. But they were so cute and tiny, I want to eat them all up. Anyway... The attendant seemed to be a combat maid. The slave was a kid as young as the avian. She's probably her pet. Find anything on your end, Darling?"

"Yep, there's a fun little room in the dungeon. I wanna go check it out right away."

And so they dove into the dungeon. Their destination was the greed trap. Goblins and Clay Golems had stopped posing any threat to the pair of C-Ranks, and they quickly reached their destination, albeit after being stalled a bit by the moving walls. As had been reported, there was a sword stuck into a pedestal. They confirmed that the entrance would be sealed by spikes when the sword was removed.

"So? Isn't this a splendid room, Honey?"

"Oh yes, absolutely! But those needles hardly seem airtight. Won't the screams be audible from the outside?"

"A girl's screams definitely reach pretty far... Alright, we'll start by punching her throat!"

"Once we bring them in here, we can make them watch from start to finish, all the way up until the dungeon eats the girl's corpse."

They both cackled.

"Since we're here, want to get a little exercise?"

"Absolutely, Darling... or so I'd like to say, but let's save our energy for our prey."

“That’s too bad, but if you say so, Peesa. I can’t wait. Ahhh, I really want to make that rich girl drink her slave’s pee. After all, how can you say you love your pet if you won’t even drink her pee?”

“Aha, she’ll probably cry tears of gratitude for us.”

The two of them kissed, then began outlining a plan to hunt their prey. A plan to hunt the three girls which would both fill their wallet and provide no doubt endless amusement. The avian girl and the beastkin slave where both children. They wouldn’t be an issue. The problem was the maid. That the rich girl only had the single maid as a bodyguard was a sign of her trusted strength. They would need to join their party and scout the maid out before they made their move.

“Okay. Let’s start ironing out the details. So that our future might be full of fun.”

“So that our future might be full of wealth.”

Peesa and Garbo exchanged their motto, then began discussing their plan in depth. Deep within the dungeon in a locked room so that nobody could hear them.

Keima’s Perspective

Yeah, I heard everything. Suckers.

What did I hear? Peesa and Garbo’s plan to hunt rookies. I was monitoring the dungeon for a change of pace after finishing modifications and saw that the greed trap room was currently activated. I peeked inside, curious, and started eavesdropping after seeing them chatting in the back. Long story short, they were discussing their rookie hunting plot. *Ahaha, these two sure are unlucky.*

Not to mention that they were targeting Maiodore (who was under my care), her maid, and Niku. Maiodore had ran off to the Guild saying, “I would like to go on adventures with my fiancée Kuro as well!” and registered as an adventurer with her maid and Niku in tow, apparently while one of those two was watching.

In any case, they were absolutely pumped to start doing things that would require “guro” and “explicit content” tags on a certain art website. Nothing could possibly be worse for raising Rokuko and Niku into fine young ladies. *And hey, don’t take that as me saying I wouldn’t care if they tricked random rookies I didn’t know. At the end of the day, I don’t want serial killers on the loose in my town. So yeah, hah, these two really are unlucky.*

First, they declared that they would kill adventurers staying in the town. That wasn’t just picking a fight with me as town chief, it was threatening to diminish the DP income I received as Dungeon Master. Strike one.

At this point, I still would have let them leave alive. (Not

unharméd, but alive.)

Second, the resident they targeted was the noble daughter who was under my care. I would be held completely responsible for anything that happened to Maïodore here, and honestly, I wasn't looking for a war with Tsia. Not to mention that they were planning to do the deed inside the dungeon to pin their deaths on the dungeon. Yeah, eat a dick. Strike two.

At this point, I still wouldn't kill them. (I never said they wouldn't prefer to be dead.)

But third and most importantly, the moment they targeted my dakimakura, Niku, their strikes went straight to the cap and they were out of the game. *Or should I say they were out of... being alive? Mwahaha. They're going to regret ever being unambiguously evil.*

And so, I reported them straight to the guild.

...What? I could've disposed of them in secret, but a pair of C-Rank adventurers suddenly disappearing after gathering information on a dungeon would draw a lot of unwanted attention on us. It'd be especially suspicious if they told the guild receptionist that they were sticking to the upper floors just to be safe, for instance. I'm definitely not just too lazy to finish them myself. I was being a proper, law-abiding citizen by reporting them.

Who knows! Maybe reporting them here is setting up a flag for them trying to execute their plan but failing! After all, they're dealing with Niku here, she would kick the crap out of them! Evidence?! I don't need it! I heard about it in the dungeon! Well, basically, I'm laying the groundwork here. Gotta take things step by step.

Thus, I went to the guild, walked up to the usual receptionist, and casually said I had something to talk about.

"...And that's what I heard. Think you can do anything about them before they start hunting rookies? They're targeting Lady Mai, a member of the nobility, so I'm thinking this is a pretty serious issue."

"I see. Understood. How would you like to deal with them?"

"Huh? Uhhhh, well, probably give them a death sentence? They seem like repeat offenders, so."

"Understood. In that case, I will entrust their execution to you, Keima, and forward a motion to seize their assets."

"Wha?" *This receptionist is already talking about seizing assets, I can't keep up.*

"As we the Guild would like to compensate the families of their victims to the best of our ability, any information you can extract from them would be grateful. Do not feel compelled, however, as that is outside of your responsibility."

"Huh? Er, uh..."

"...Is there anything else?"

Uhhh, I dunno, I just got thrown off 'cause things went way faster than I expected. Shouldn't she like begin an investigation to make sure this is true? Is just not considering that I might be lyin— Wait, maybe she's using a lie detecting magic tool beneath the counter. Still, I would think that talking to the accused before executing them would be important.

"Uh, aren't you settling things a little too quickly here? Did you already have evidence on them or something?"

"No, not in particular, but we have your word."

"Uhhhh."

"Thus, an execution is appropriate."

"Uhhh, huh."

"....."

"...Seriously? My word is enough to sentence people to death?"

"Yes?"

Even if she was using a lie detecting magic tool beneath the counter, I still thought that she should investigate and secure proof before going any further. It was possible I had misheard, for instance.

"...Do you need an explanation?"

"Oh, yeah. Please and thank you." I nodded, which made the receptionist give out a heavy, exasperated sigh.

"You are the town chief, Keima. Do you understand that being town chief means you are the highest authority in the town and thereby the top of the judicial system?"

"Uhhh, well. It sounds kind of heavy when you put it that way." Although I was letting Wozma do all the real town chief work, I still had the authority for myself.

"The town chief giving his word is equivalent to a trial being settled. As a representative of the Adventurer's Guild, I confirmed what sentence you were carrying out, and that is that. All that remains is you carrying out the sentence."

"Uhhh, alright then." Basically, if the highest authority of a region and the relevant organizations all agreed on something, they could execute anyone they wanted without a trial.

...Christ! Human lives mean nothing in this world! I mean, it's understandable since you can literally buy living slaves for a single gold coin (equivalent to about 10,000,000 yen or 10,000 dollars), but still. And I managed to get Ichika for just fifty silvers, too...

"Additionally, may I say something in confidence?"

"Uh, yeah." I leaned forward so she could whisper into my ear, quiet enough for nobody else to hear.

"...As you are a noble, Keima, your word would be enough to execute two commoner adventurers even if you weren't town chief." A shudder ran down my spine. And not because her breath tickled my ear, either.

...Seriously? I cradled my head on the inside, metaphorically.

To sum things up: a noble (me) accused two commoner adventurers of a crime, putting them in judicial trouble. The noble (me) desired an execution. On top of that, the highest authority in the town (me) agreed with the execution. Meanwhile, the judicial body (me) decided their crimes justified an execution. The decision was discussed with the guild first.

The noble (me), the highest authority in the town (me), and the judicial body (me) all spoke against the adventurers. Their (my) claims had no contradictions or apparent falsehoods, so the Guild representative agreed with the decision. The main proof being the word of the highest authority in the town (me) and the noble (me).

With that settled, the Adventurer's Guild requested that the highest authority in the town (me) carry out the sentence. Which left only executing them.

Yeah, so basically, regardless of all that rookie hunting stuff, I can kill anyone I want if I don't lie about anything. Being both a noble and a town chief essentially makes me a dictator. One wrong word and I could have someone executed... This is the power that ultimate authority gives a ruler. Jesus! Politics are scary!

"...Uhhh, how do you know I'm a noble?"

"I'm afraid that is confidential."

Huh. Well, me being a noble is thanks to my B-Rank in the Guild. It's not odd at all for someone from the Guild to know about it, doubly so given Haku's involvement. And well, I won't look a gift horse in the mouth. It's convenient that the guild is on my side and that's good enough for me.

"We are aware that you own two cards. You are an exception in many ways, and I request that you quickly become B-Rank so that both your cards can be unified. Will you take the test? Or I could pass you without you ever taking the test, if you wish."

"...Uhhh, I'll think about it." I gave a vague reply. *Forget about it, I don't wanna publicly be a noble too. Ah... But wait, Niku showed her B-Rank card to the Tsia archduke. Was that a big mistake?*

"Incidentally, regarding the rookie hunters, do you know how they operate?"

"Oh, like their tricks and stuff? Sure." I went ahead and spilled the beans on everything I knew about them. 'Cause I mean, why not?

...Alright, how should I go about this? Guess I should just get as much information on the victims as possible out of them, then kill them in the dark depths of the dungeon. Might as well use the opportunity to test some things.

I couldn't expose Maiodore to danger while she was in my care. Rei had an {Illusion} skill she bought while strengthening herself.

That allowed her to conjure illusions. They were convincing enough to fool even Leona the God of Chaos, which made me think they were a perfect fit for this situation.

“So basically, I want you to create illusory body doubles of Maiodore and her maid with your {Illusion} skill. Think you can manage?” When I brought up the subject to Rei, she frowned, uncomfortable.

“Er, are you going to use them as body doubles? The truth is, um, the magic won’t work in front of a large crowd... Forgive me.”

“Huh? Why not?”

“...Ahhh. Um, well. I’m not entirely sure why, but the more people are looking at an illusion the harder it is to fool all of them, and eventually the magic just breaks. This is less true when using the magic on yourself, but making two body doubles would be very difficult. I think they would withstand five onlookers at best.”

Rei’s illusions were probably the kind where false information was transmitted, rather than causing physical transformations to match the desired illusion. They say that the universe maintains itself through being observed or something, so maybe the more people that observe an illusion, the more power is needed to preserve it? I dunno. But however they worked it was complicated and a pain for us. *Guess I’ll just remember that the illusions won’t work in front of large crowds.*

“Oh, but stealth illusions work in front of crowds!”

“Interesting. You’re talking about illusions that make you invisible, then.” *Yeah, I can make a plan around this.*

“Would two body doubles fool two people at once?”

“Easily! Oh, but their hands will go right through the illusions if they try touching them. You’ll want some kind of body for them. Two golems would be nice, but I suppose they would be too obviously hard?”

“...If I make them then cover them with an illusion, it should be fine? Might as well make them wear clothes too.”

The illusion magic’s defect meant that we couldn’t talk to them in the guild, which left inside the dungeon as the second best place. *I’m gonna have to tell Maiodore to hide inside the inn until it’s safe again. Guess I’ll call for her now.*

“Ahhh, um, Master. There’s one other problem with using illusion magic...”

“Yeah?”

“I won’t be able to recreate Mai and her maid’s bodies unless I have a strong mental image of them. If you would allow me to give them a full body massage... ah, but even then, I’ll only be able to remember everything for a full day.”

“...Guess even magic takes hard work sometimes. Alright. Would

you go get those two for me, and Niku while you're at it?" That last part was apparently less a problem with illusion magic and more a problem with Rei's memory. Was it impressive that she could remember the entire bodies of two people for a full day? I had no idea.

Rei went to get Maiodore, the maid, and Niku for me. The three of them came not long after Rei left the room.

"Keima, we were told you wished to talk. What might be the matter? Is this perchance about my engagement to Kuro?"

"...Is it pillow time?"

Rei had apparently told them exactly nothing. The maid was standing behind Maiodore, looking as composed as ever. And for the record, I wouldn't have called Maiodore if it was indeed quote pillow time unquote.

I decided to cut straight to the point.

"Uhhh, alright, I'm talking as the town chief right now. Two dangerous criminals have infiltrated the town. They're adventurers belonging to the Guild, but they're hunting rookies and often killing them."

Maiodore's expression stiffened at my explanation. That was a little surprising. A normal noble girl might have paled or gotten weepy, but Maiodore wore the stern expression of a leader instead. It would probably be safe for me to be a bit more blunt about the situation.

"I won't mince words. They set their sights on you after you went to the Adventurer's Guild to get registered."

"...I see, that explains why you summoned me. What do you intend to do, Keima?"

"Well, they're getting the death sentence. I want you and your maid to sit still in the inn until all this blows over."

"I suppose we don't really have a choice in the matter," said Maiodore with a nod.

"Yep, please excuse the inconvenience. And while you're here, there's something I want to ask you to do."

"By all means, ask. What do you need?"

"It's pretty simple overall. I want you and your maid to get a full body massage from Rei."

"...Um. I don't follow."

Can't blame you there. If someone asked me to get a full body massage to help execute some criminals, I'd be just as confused as Maiodore was. I wouldn't tilt my head so far that my allegorical blue hair would sway in the air, though.

"It's got to do with a skill. Rei can use the {Illusion} skill, so I was

thinking of having her make illusory body doubles of you two. But {Illusion} isn't a very convenient skill. She needs to give someone a full body massage to make a body double, and even then only for a day."

"I understand the circumstances now. Very well."

"On top of all that, the illusion will break down in front of crowds, so we'll need to meet them in the dungeon."

Incidentally, explaining Rei's skill in such detail was to signal that it was a difficult skill to work with and one we weren't really able to use for malicious purposes. It would be a lot more convenient for me if it none of it was true and we could use it for malicious purposes, though.

"...Yes, I see. That is understandable."

"Nice. Alright, let's get started th—"

"But first, Keima. Doesn't that mean the criminals will need to enter the dungeon?"

"Huh? Uh, yeah."

"The fact that you have elected not to just simply suppress them with force immediately upon finding them leads me to believe you are attempting to minimize potential violence and destruction."

Holy crap, why didn't I think of that?! Hah, just kidding. The possibility of just arresting them on sight came to mind. But I dunno. I think it comes down to the people's trust in me and my own faith in myself not being a dictator. If I don't show proof that they really are rookie hunters, people might think I just gave a death sentence to two innocent people. Consider this needlessly elaborate plot to be my own way of preserving my self-esteem.

"In which case, I believe it would be best for me to lure the criminals into the dungeon as bait before you go in to arrest them."

"...That's one option, but it would be exposing you to too much risk. They might take you as a hostage."

"I would like to be useful to my fiancée at times." Maiodore stared up at me. I was slightly confused since I still didn't really associate Niku with being Maiodore's fiancée.

But well, if she wanted to be useful, who was I to refuse? I could just send her a personal quest through the Adventurer's Guild to give her an excuse to be out and about.

"In that case, please get money from the Guild and bring it to the church as a donation. I'll send word about you ahead of time. While you're there, swap places with the body double. Sound good?" I added (for the maid's benefit) that the criminals definitely wouldn't go after her in the middle of town with eyes everywhere, and got a nod in return.

As an aside, when I told Maiodore to treat Niku like a pet as part

of her cover, she started blushing and grinning hard, asking excitedly if that was really okay. *Let's not think about that too much.*

Also, Rei apparently needed to memorize the smell and feel of clothes as well to complete the illusion. The fact that she subsequently sniffed, licked, slobbered all over, and even chewed on unwashed, worn underwear to accomplish that can be a secret between you and me.



...I mean, her doing that was a serious part of her job, okay? She may have looked like a total pervert doing it, but I promise, she's a good girl.

Anyway. Now that the surface level plan is in motion, time to get some background wheels turning.

A Piece of Garbage's Perspective

When the following day came and they found their targets in the guild, Peesa and Garbo spoke to them immediately. They wore the friendly smiles they always did when meeting new people.

"Hey, girls! How about you three join our party? I'm Garbo and I'm a C-Rank."

"Ahaha, and I'm Peesa. Also a C-Rank." They showed their guild cards while speaking to the blue-haired rich-looking girl and her maid, who were sitting at a two-person table. There was a dog beastkin beside the rich girl, but there was no point in talking to a slave.

The air in the guild seemed to tense up a bit after they spoke. It was likely that more than a few other parties were after these easy targets. *Idiots, those who dare win. Especially since I hear there's a famous lolicon lady killer in this town. You have only yourselves to blame for not acting fast enough,* thought Garbo with an internal grin.

"A-Are you speaking to us? Erm, ah, I-I do not mind, but why?"

"Well. You three are newbies, yeah? We figured we could show you the ropes and help you get your feet wet."

"My lady, I believe there are more reliable adventurers here that we could ask." The maid interrupted with some inconvenient advice, but Garbo's smile didn't falter.

"Yep yep, that's the exact kind of suspicion you need to survive as an adventurer. You three have a bright future ahead of yourselves, if you ask me. Which is exactly why you should party up with us."

"Our hearts just ache whenever we see newbies having trouble. You clearly come from a well-off background, and we couldn't live with ourselves if we let anything happen to you right after you struck out on your own," said Peesa while looking straight into the rich girl's eyes. Their plan for the day was just to introduce themselves and start building trust.

"...Sheena, I think we can trust these two. They are C-Ranks, after all." But surprisingly enough, the rich girl was cooperative. Garbo shifted to moving a little faster than planned.

"Well, you heard the girl. Whaddaya say, miss maid?"

"Don't worry about Garbo pulling anything funny. He already has me, his little honey bear."

"Hm..."

“I’m sure it’ll be fine, Sheena.”

“If you insist, my lady, I will oppose them no further. But if they attempt to do anything to you, I will not hold back.” Sheena glared sharply at Garbo, who gave a relaxed shrug. The rich girl gave a polite bow while smiling apologetically.

“Please call me Mai. My maid is named Sheena. Th-This beastkin is, m-my pet. Yes! My pet. Eheheh.” She stroked the expressionless beastkin’s black hair, grinning as she did so. *Y’know, I’m surprised she lets that slave wear nice human clothes. Those look pretty expensive,* thought Garbo.

“...Seems like she might not get in our way, Darling,” whispered Peesa in a voice quiet enough that only Garbo could hear. She was looking at the beastkin’s tail. When beastkins were fond of their master — particularly dog beastkin — they wagged their tails. This beastkin’s tail remained still.

Contrary to what one might think, even well-dressed slaves often hated their master. Reason being, it was commonplace for slave owners to not consider what was important to their slaves. In situations like that, slaves would pessimistically pray for their owner’s death, and simply watch from afar when danger threatened them.

And in any case, a sword thrust at a slave’s face was just as deadly as the collar around their neck. Which threat they prioritized was up to the slave, and many preferred to die while causing as much suffering to their despised master as possible. It was that simple.

“In that case, Mai, shall we escort you to the dungeon?”

“Um, well, before that, might we stop by the church so I can pray? I haven’t yet prayed this morning.”

“The church...? Sure, no problem.” Mai got out of her chair and headed for the exit. Her slave followed immediately behind, then the maid stood at the rear as if to keep her lady separate from Peesa and Garbo. They didn’t mind, though, and followed them out of the guild.

...One of the adventurers who had been watching them turned and whispered to the guild receptionist.

“Seems like the town chief was right.”

“Indeed. At this point, it is clear that they are committing premeditated crimes. All that is left is for the town chief to take care of them.” The whole guild began discussing Peesa and Garbo, but none of the conversations ever reached their ears.

Peesa and Garbo waited outside of the church while Mai prayed. Naturally, that was because they understood their souls were too impure to stand before God... not. They were stopped from entering by a beautiful nun who wanted to talk. That kind of upset Peesa, but it didn’t bother her too much. She shifted into small talk mode to gather information while they waited.

“Oh, so you used to be in Pavella?” asked the nun.

“Yep. Believe it or not I’m pretty good at my job, too. Never let any of my prey escape once I’ve got my eyes on them. Do you dislike adventurers, Sister?”

“Of course not. Our Beddhist Church is on good terms with the goddess of adventurers, the Ivory Goddess. It would be absurd for any of us to dislike adventurers.”

“This is the first time I’m hearing of the Beddhist Church. What’s it all about? What god do you worship?”

“In truth, there is no god of Beddhist. But our teachings are simple. Prioritize sleep and peaceful living, and do not bother the lives of others. It would be fair to say that all of Beddhist doctrine is derived from those two principles.” The nun gave a sensual smile that made Garbo’s heart thump. Not because he was more than bothering the lives of others, but because the nun really was just extremely cute.

“You know,” he said, “how about you and I go to the dungeon together sometime?”

“Oh my, should you be asking that in front of your girlfriend?”

“Ahaha, don’t mind me. A good man goes after what he wants, after all. It’s been hard for me to satisfy my darling alone, and I was just thinking it’d be nice to have two or three more girls along for the ride.” The corners of Peesa’s mouth twitched as she spoke.

“In that case, if the opportunity arises, I would love to. We nuns have been discussing whether we should register as adventurers ourselves.”

Garbo looked so clearly head over heels for the nun that Peesa decided targeting the sisters next would be a pretty fine idea.

“I’m back.” Mai returned during the middle of their conversation. Her expression looked so bright and cheery it was almost like she was a different person.

“Shall we go, Garbo? I am fully prepared to be escorted.”

“But of course. See you later, Sister.”

“Indeed. May you be blessed with a long and eternal sleep. Oyasuminasai,” said the sister while twirling her circular necklace (apparently a holy symbol) with a smile. Reluctantly, Garbo turned his back to her and took his present target’s hand.

They reached their hunting grounds in no time.

“Shall we go ahead and enter the dungeon?”

“Yes, absolutely. I’ll be in your care, Peesa and Garbo.”

They entered the dungeon with Peesa, a ranger, taking the lead. Mai was supposedly finally entering a dungeon for the first time in her life... but nonetheless looked more calm than Garbo expected. She didn’t look very excited to be entering her first dungeon, or maybe she was just good at hiding her feelings.

“Have you been in a dungeon before, Mai?”

“Yes, I went with Sheena to the dungeon yesterday. Though it was just a brief visit, and we turned back after the second room.” *Oh, she already popped her dungeon cherry*, nodded Garbo on the inside. The town’s dungeon was interesting in that even F-Rank adventurers were allowed to enter it. Even a freshly registered G-Rank, the lowest rank, could enter with a D-Rank or above in their party.

“With Sheena by my side, this dungeon doesn’t even pose a threat.”

“Please do not let your guard down, my lady. All dungeons are dangerous and should be treated with care. Peesa, Garbo, please say something to her.” Sheena sought support from Peesa and Garbo, but they just laughed on the inside. The best thing to do with ignorant rich girls was to feed their arrogance and breed an exploitable reliance on others.

“Actually, she’s right. The first floor of this dungeon’s officially recognized as a place for beginners, so it’s not too dangerous. She can let her guard down all she wants, we’ll back her up.”

“Mhm, absolutely. That’s why Darling and I are here.” Peesa winked. Two goblins conveniently chose that moment to attack, so the duo fought them off while protecting Mai just as they had said they would. Despite their rotten hearts they were still C-Ranks, and goblins were less than no threat to them.

“Very impressive swordplay. Don’t you think the same, Ku— I mean, my pet?”

“.....” Mai’s pet beastkin was staring into space with cold, expressionless eyes. She wasn’t looking at her master. That confirmed to Peesa that the two of them weren’t on good terms.

“I-I would like to reward you for your skillful display of martial prowess, Garbo. Please accept this.” Mai proudly cast {Wallet} and took out a silver coin, which she gave to Garbo.

“Ahaha, thanks a ton.” Just how much money was in that wallet? The thought alone made Garbo break out into a grin. As an aside, the money stored in the Space-Time magic {Wallet} would scatter onto the ground after the caster’s death.

“Oh? Nothing for me, Mai?”

“Garbo did all the work with those goblins. I don’t believe I saw you do anything, Peesa. What about you, Sheena?”

“Indeed, Peesa did nothing at all. No reward is necessary for useless party members.” Sheena’s followup made Peesa spit angrily on the inside. Amateurs. Peesa had noticed the goblins first and blocked their retreat so that they wouldn’t flee before being killed. But Sheena’s scorn meant she hadn’t noticed that, which let Peesa lower her guard a bit — perhaps the maid wasn’t a skilled bodyguard after

all. In terms of being useless, she had just stood beside her lady as the battle happened without doing anything at all.

...If that meant Peesa could play with her while she was still alive, it was something to celebrate. Playing with corpses could wait until after she killed them.

“Darling, could I have that one? I want to cut her tendons, bury her body in stone, then heal her and make her watch us kill her lady.”

“Heheh, that’s my honey. You have good taste.”

The two of them whispered stealthily among themselves, too quiet for Mai to hear.

“Want to try going a little deeper? We heard about a fun little room back in the guild. How’s that sound? Don’t worry, you’ll be safe with us.”

“Yes, that certainly sounds fun.”

“My lady, I believe it would be dangerous to go any further.”

“Be quiet, Sheena. We have nothing to fear with a brave C-rank like Garbo on our side.” The maid fell silent, likely unable to argue with her lady.

“.....” The beastkin pet sighed with cold eyes.

They passed the first floor and finally reached the labyrinth area. There weren’t any dangerous enemies on this floor, either. At most there were Iron Golems, but they had only encountered Clay Golems so far. They were as effortless to defeat as goblins were. And despite the dead ends, they stuck to their map and soon reached their destination — the trap room. Mai and the others went into the room at Peesa and Garbo’s encouragement.

Peesa approached the pedestal with the sword stuck in it. Once everyone was inside (with Garbo at the back), she pulled the sword out. Immediately, spikes shot out and blocked the exit.

“Oh no! We’re trapped inside!” yelled Garbo, sounding somewhat forced.

“Ah! Wh-Where did those spikes come from?”

“Wh-What’s going on?”

Mai and her maid both panicked. They spoke almost simultaneously, as if they were spiritually connected somehow. Garbo watched their confusion with a grin. It seemed that none of them knew how the room worked. Had they known, things would have gotten a bit more complicated.

“What in the world is going on, Garbo?”

“Fear not, Mai. According to what we learned at the guild, this room locks itself for one night after the Magic Blade is pulled from the pedestal. As this is a Safe Zone, there’s nothing to worry about.”

“Just one night?”

“Yep. Our plans were to stay here for the night and leave

tomorrow morning.” Garbo smiled to calm Mai down. She nodded, understanding the situation.

“I would rather you not make our plans for us. We are not prepared in the least to stay here overnight.”

“My apologies. But again, fear not. We prepared well ahead of time. Of course, we have enough for everyone.” Garbo chanted the spell for {Storage}, then took out folded tents, sleeping bags, and so on. The scroll for {Storage} was well worth the high expense. Since time stopped within it, he could even store the dismembered body parts of his prey while they were warm and keep them that way.

“Oh, I see you have {Storage}. I suppose we won’t need to fear a lack of food then.”

“Yep. As you can see, we have hot and fresh food at the ready.” Garbo took out a steaming pot of soup. Of course, the soup was drugged. A single mouthful of it wouldn’t do anything, but an hour after drinking a full bowl of the soup one would feel themselves start weakening, and after another hour they would be completely paralyzed. If he could get them to drink the soup, their job would be easier, but...

“My lady, I must insist that you eat food I prepared myself. We do not know what they might have put into that soup.”

“If you insist, Sheena. I’m sorry, Garbo, but please eat that soup with Peesa.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Naturally, things didn’t go that easily. Garbo clicked his tongue quietly. But attacking them at night was still an option. And so it became time to wait.

It was hard to tell time in a dungeon, but it was easy to distinguish day and night. Even the inside of a dungeon darkened when it was nighttime. Without the {Night Vision} skill, it was difficult to traverse a dungeon at night without any lights.

When it came time to sleep, Mai and her companions went to sleep in the tent Garbo gave them without any of them staying up to keep watch. In front of said tent stood Peesa and Garbo, blending in with the darkness due to neither of them carrying light. Their own tent was some distance away. They were standing by the other tent, of course, to attack its occupants.

“Excuse me...” said Peesa while slipping into the tent. It wasn’t a large one, but there was enough space for three or so people to lay down next to each other. Inside was Mai and her maid wrapped up in their blankets, asleep, while the beastkin pet was sitting further inside.

Peesa glanced at the pet. At first the beastkin seemed to have fallen asleep while sitting, but then they made eye contact. She swallowed her surprise and smiled.

“We won’t do anything to you if you keep quiet, okay?”

“.....” The pet just remained silent and looked at Peesa, seemingly uninterested. *I knew it*, thought Peesa with a grin as she took out a collar from her pouch — a slave collar, which she attached to the sleeping maid’s neck.

“*****... ***, ****, *****, **** — {Illegal Order: 5}.” The collar shone. Success. The spell would now make the collar squeeze on Peesa and Garbo’s orders. They had bought the spell from a black market merchant, and it enabled the caster to squeeze a slave collar five times. It also prevented the slave collar from being removed. However, it had one flaw. The fifth squeeze would continue until the wearer’s death.

With the biggest obstacle out of the way, it was time for fun.

“Darling, everything’s ready.”

“Thanks, Honey. Love you bunches.” Garbo waltzed into the tent without any hesitation once Peesa called for him. Which happened to wake Mai up.

“Mnnn... ah, Garbo? Wha, wh-why are you here?”

“To continue escorting you and your companions, of course. Heheh.” Garbo grinned. It wasn’t the friendly smile he showed in the guild, either. It was the twisted smile of one who took pleasure in the suffering and misfortune of others.

“No way... Sheena, wake up! Dispose of these ruffians!”

“Yes, m-my lady! Right awa— ngh! Nggh, ngggh...” Sheena fell to the ground after the collar squeezed her neck.

“Hah, what a weak maid you turned out to be. A little squeeze on your neck is all it takes to knock you out? Maybe you weren’t her bodyguard after all. Guess I let myself worry too much.”

“What did you do to Sheena?!”

“Put a collar on her and disciplined her a bit. Dooon’t worry, the night’s only just begun. We’ll have plenty of fun from now on. If you stay nice and obedient... Well, actually, I’m not into piss-stained brats. I’ll just stick with the maid instead.”

Garbo dug through Sheena’s bag and took out a guild card. “Here it is... Wait, you’re just a fuckin’ D-Rank? Where’d all that confidence of yours come from? I wasted every second I spent thinking about you. Here, Honey, a present.”

“Thanks, Darling. Love you.” Garbo threw Sheena’s guild card and Peesa caught it and then took out a skewer with multiple guild cards stuck on it from {Storage}. She stuck Sheena’s card onto the skewer as well.

“Ahaha, I have way too many D-Rank cards now.” Sheena kept a collection of guild cards stolen from her victims. They would never rot, and they didn’t take up much space either. She considered her hobby much more practical than Garbo’s.

“.....” Seeing that, the beastkin stood up and rifled through some nearby bags. That threw Peesa off until she held out a guild card to her. It was Mai’s F-Rank guild card.

“What are you doing?! Have you forgotten all I’ve done for you?!”

“My my, looks like you weren’t loved at all, Mai. Ahaha.” Peesa, still sitting, took the card and took out another skewer from her {Storage}. But then, just as she was putting it back away, the beastkin jumped forward with immense speed and stuck her hand into the open {Storage} hole. From within it she pulled out the E-Rank and C-Rank guild card skewers.

“What?!”

“One for each rank? Doesn’t seem to be any B-Ranks or above. That’s fine.” There were much fewer D-Rank and C-Rank cards in comparison to the F-Rank and E-Rank cards.

“What in the—” Before Peesa could finish, the beastkin punched her in the face so hard she fell onto the floor, unconscious from the single blow. The pet stood above her, opening and clenching her right fist.

“That’s enough.”

“Wait, you aren’t going to ask about the victims? Or their methods? I thought we were just about to start having our own fun.”

“No need. We have the cards of the victims. That’s all we need.” A girl’s voice came out of nowhere, and the pet was replying to it.

For a second Garbo froze in place, not understanding anything, but it wasn’t long before he came back to his senses. At which point his next move was obvious.

“Don’t move! Don’t take another step! Listen up, if you make a single move, this girl’s life is mine.” He lifted Mai up and stuck a knife at her throat. Garbo’s decision was, honestly, the right call.

“What do you think he means, Niku?” asked the feminine voice.

“...Maybe something that will help Master?”

“No no, I don’t think so. He’ll definitely notice what’s going on now that he’s touching the body.”

“Oh.”

It was the right call, but only if Garbo’s understanding of the situation was accurate. Take the rich girl hostage, save Peesa, escape from the tent, and buy enough time to get away. It would have gone perfectly. Not to mention that if the girl died, her slave would end up freed. All he’d have to do is touch her collar and send in mana to make her his slave. Though judging by how fast she just moved, that wouldn’t be so easy for him.

However, despite her master — the one who controlled whether she lived or died — being captured, the pet just continued to tie up Peesa without showing a care in the world. Entirely as if what was

going on had nothing to do with her.

“Seriously, what’s with you?! Let Peesa go! Don’t you care what happens to this girl?!”

“You may do whatever you like with that.”

“What’re you...” It was at that moment that Garbo noticed something was off. Ever since he took her captive, Mai hadn’t said a word or moved. She wasn’t asleep, either; she had been awake since everything started. It didn’t even feel like she was breathing, and despite her body being pressed against his, he couldn’t feel any warmth.

Garbo looked at Mai and, finally, saw her for the first time. She... No, *it* was a doll made of wood. The hair alone was surprisingly realistic, but its face was blank with only a pathetic bump for a nose. There weren’t even eye sockets or a mouth. The doll tilted its head with a clatter as Garbo looked at its face.

“Gah?!” Garbo threw the doll that was once Mai away. In the direction of the slave, of course, to kill two birds with one stone. He then bolted out of the tent. Abandoning Peesa.

Throwing the doll at the slave had seemingly been the right choice, as he managed to make it all the way to the pedestal. He had to put the Magic Blade back inside before he could escape the room. That meant he had to pass back by the tent on his way out, but if he focused on running then he shouldn’t have any problem escaping... He was a C-Rank frontliner after all. He had confidence in his skills.

“What the shit, what the absolute shit?! Things were going so well, and then...!” He wondered what he did wrong, but there was no answer.

...It was tough luck for Peesa, but they had to split up. Those were monsters in human form. They’d both die if they caught him. Right, they were monsters in huma—

“...Monsters? Wait, this is a fuckin’ Safe Zone.” Which meant they were Variants? Right, they had to be Variants. It was the duty of all adventurers to report Variants, and those who provided information on them were rewarded famously.

Right, that’s right! I’m not running away here, I’m just holding a tactical retreat since I need to report this! Garbo stuck the Magic Blade on his hip back into the pedestal.

“Alright, now I can...” started Garbo as he turned around to look at the exit. But the spikes were still blocking the hallway out. It felt as if he was trapped inside the mouth of a monster.

“But why...? This isn’t what the guild said. It should be open now.”

“Oh, what an odd thing for you to say. Did you not say yourself that once the Magic Blade is removed, the room locks for the rest of

the night? All we did was make that a reality.” He turned in the direction of the voice and saw a silver-haired girl he didn’t recognize.

“Who are you?! Where did you come from?!”

“Where? Is there not only one entrance to the room?” The girl laughed. “In any case, your life is over. My condolences.”

“Wh-What’re you...?”

The girl snapped, and a rock fell from the ceiling. For a second he thought it was a falling boulder trap, but then the rock stood up. It was an Iron Golem.

“No way... This is a fuckin’ Safe Zone!”

“So what if it is? You should be concerned about what’s above you.”

At her advice, Garbo looked up. There he saw that the ceiling was covered with a layer of iron balls.

...Don’t tell me those are all Iron Golems, he thought. But indeed they were, and the one directly above his head started to stir. He dashed out of the way in fear, moments later hearing a loud slam right where he once stood.

“You’re not safe there, either.”

“G-Gah?!” The Iron Golems — dolls, if you will — rained down everywhere he went. It was like they were guiding him into a corner, blocking off more and more escape routes as he continued fleeing.

“G-GAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

“Hmm. You know, falling golems are a more effective trap than I expected.”

“Fuck! Help me! I’ll pay you everything I’ve got! I have tons of money saved in the guild, I’ll even give you Peesa’s secret staaaash!” yelled Garbo, and immediately the golems stopped falling.

“Haah, haah... I’m saved...?”

However, the fallen Iron Golems stood up and steadily surrounded Garbo. There were too many for a mere C-Rank to break through, and even if they had all been Stone Golems, he would have struggled to escape. Not to mention that the exit hallway was blocked off anyway. There was nowhere for him to run.

“Rei, why are you playing around?”

“Oh, Niku. Don’t misunderstand. This is an experiment for a new trap that Master made, I’m certainly not playing around.”

Garbo could see over the golems the silver-haired girl chatting casually with the beastkin slave. Behind the slave was another faceless wooden doll, this one wearing Sheena’s clothes. There was Peesa’s slave collar around its neck, but she was unconscious and slung over its shoulder. That was what finally made Garbo realize that they had been tricked by someone.

“Fuck...! Why?! Why do I have to go through this?! What did I

ever do?!”

“What are you even talking about? You’re a rookie hunter.”

“It’s a dog eat dog world out here! I didn’t do anything wrong, I just followed the rules of nature! The weak should fear the strong!”

“You would say that now? Well, I suppose I can’t disagree,” said the silver-haired girl, which made Garbo realize that at the moment he was the prey, surrounded by the hunting dogs in the form of golems. What a fool he was.

“Peesa! Wake up, Peesaaaa! Help meee! Do somethiiiiing!” Garbo yelled just loud enough for Peesa to start twitching awake.

“Ngh... Darling? I... ow! Wait, what?! What’s going on?”

“Honey! Kill them! Hurry, don’t hold baaack!” Garbo ordered the collar on the doll’s neck to squeeze four times. That would make the collar squeeze until the neck bones broke — or in this case, until the wooden neck snapped. And just as Garbo planned, the results of {Illegal Order} led to the doll’s neck snapping. The wooden head rolled right off. Peesa used the opportunity to roll off the shoulder and escape.

“Kill them! Kill them aaaall!”

“I don’t know what’s going on, but die!” Peesa deftly used the knife hidden in her sleeve to cut off her bindings. She then attacked the silver-haired girl with a large needle-like blade that had also been hidden in her sleeves.

She’s dead, thought Peesa and Garbo, but the needle went through thin air without hitting anything. They had seen the blade hit the girl, but it went right through her.

“Too bad. I’m so fast you only hit my afterimage.”

“She’s an illusion.”

“Um, Niku? Did you really have to tell them that?”

The two of them continued chatting casually as Peesa staggered from the inertia.

“Wh-Why, wh-where even are we?! Why are there so many Iron Golems?!” Peesa flung her head around, trying to absorb the situation, only to have the beastkin slave punch her head again. On the opposite side this time. Once again she fell unconscious.

“All quiet again.”

“Good work, Niku. I’m a little surprised she had that spike up her sleeve... But in any case, how did that Mannequin Golem’s neck snap?”

“It was probably due to the slave collar.”

“Oh, I see... Master just ordered me to learn more about that magic. We’ll investigate later.”

They seemed completely unfazed by what had just happened. Peesa’s desperate resistance had been nothing to them. Like an ant

fighting a giant. There was just too big of a gap in their power levels. Who in the world were they? Garbo felt his last glimmer of hope get crushed.

“Oh, golems. Capture him as well, if you would.” The silver-haired girl’s tone felt like she was asking someone to pick up some trash. The Iron Golems crowded around Garbo, obeying her order.

A C-Rank adventurer could safely defeat an Iron Golem in one-on-one combat. But there was a crowd of them, and despite his valiant resistance, Garbo the C-Rank adventurer was beaten to a pulp until he was unconscious.

* * *

“Gaaaah! Wait... What?” When Garbo woke up, he was in some stone hallway. Peesa was with him. His body didn’t hurt, and Peesa’s face was back to normal.

“Huh...? Oh, it was all a dream. What a weird dream.” He didn’t know why he was sleeping in a random hallway, but it probably had something to do with dungeon traps. No way was any of that dream real. His prey being all monsters? The slave being a monster too? A silver-haired girl who controlled Iron Golems? Said Iron Golems beating the crap out of him en masse? What a horrible nightmare.

But given that he and Peesa were fine, it was clearly all a dream. He could remember everything that happened with startling clarity, but it was all a dream. *Better just forget about it*, thought Garbo to himself.

“Peesa, hey, wake up.”

“Nnn... Whaaat, Darling... Huh?” Garbo shook Peesa awake and she looked around, confused. “Where’s the rich girl and her maid? There was their beastkin pet, and... What was with the silver-haired girl?”

“G-Guess you had the same dream, Honey.”

“Dream? Right... It had to be a dream,” replied Peesa while putting a hand on her head. “So, where are we? Did you take me here, Darling?”

“Nope, I just woke up a second ago myself. You sure you don’t know where this is, Honey?”

“Not at all. It looks like we’re in the dungeon, though?” The hallway definitely did feel like part of a dungeon. It was probably one of the labyrinth corridors.

Suddenly they heard clanky footsteps coming their way. Were they from adventurers? No, there were too many of them. And the footsteps were weighty, like tons of metal hitting the ground at once.

“These are the footsteps of Iron Golems, aren’t they...? And a lot of them, at that.”

“Maybe it’s a pack of Iron Golems? Guess we should run inside this room and wait them out.” Garbo paled, thinking back to the Iron Golems beating him up in his dream. Peesa must have seen the horde of golems in her dream too, as she suggested escaping without making fun of Garbo at all. What else were two C-Ranks supposed to do?

That said, Peesa hadn’t noticed something important. The door they were going through looked fancier than the other doors. It was the boss door to the dungeon’s Boss Room. They were merely delving into an even worse hell.

...Inside the room was something resembling a royal castle’s throne room. But there was nobody inside and nothing of note except a treasure chest.

“Look, Peesa! A treasure chest.”

“Hold on, Garbo. This is probably a trapped chest. We should be careful.” As a silver lining, the chest no doubt had something that would be useful to them. They walked up to it, and the door they entered shut behind them. Then... Something fell.

It hit the ground so hard their legs vibrated. The screeching sound of metal filled the air as it stood up on the stone it had crashed down upon. It spread its wings wide and lifted its head, looking at Peesa and Garbo with ruby red eyes containing no life. It was... a member of the strongest species, a dragon.

“GUAAAAAAAAAH!” An odd roar sounding like several metal whistles blowing at once filled the air.

“An iron... dragon?!”

“R-Run awaaay!” They abandoned the chest and searched for an escape route, soon finding a door further into the room. They raced toward it, but the door was locked. “Hurry up and open it, Peesa!”

“Wait! This, no, it won’t open!”

“Wha...?! This is your job! Just do it!”

“How am I supposed to open a door with no keyhole?! This is a Boss Room!” It was a door that would only open after they defeated the boss.

“Th-This isn’t my fault! You’re the one who suggested coming in here!”

“And you agreed, didn’t you?! You’re a frontliner, fight off the dragon!”

“Don’t be ridiculous! This is a dragon we’re talking about here!”

Thump, thump. The iron dragon approached Garbo and Peesa. It wasn’t the time to be having an argument.

“...Honey, I have an idea. One of us should run for the door while the other distracts that thing.”

“Oh, and you’ll be the bait for me, of course?”

“How about we run in opposite directions and whoever it chases

will be the bait?"

"...Alright."

And so they ran off to the left and right of the dragon. It chased after Peesa... while attacking Garbo with its iron tail. Perhaps their decision to run had come too late, but either way, he could dodge it. He crouched to go under the tail.

"Gah!" The tail changed its arc as if it had eyes as well, slamming right into Garbo and knocking him unconscious.

* * *

"GAAAAH! Wait... What?" When Garbo woke up, he was in some stone hallway. Peesa was with him. His body didn't hurt, and Peesa's face was back to normal.

"Huh...? Oh, it was all a dream. What a weird dream." He didn't know why he was sleeping in a random hallway, but it probably had something to do with dungeon traps.

...Déjà vu.

"Peesa, hey, wake up! C'mon!"

"Nnn... Whaaat, Darling... Huh?" Garbo shook Peesa awake and she looked around, confused. "Where's the rich girl and her maid? There was their beastkin pet, and... What was with the silver-haired girl?"

"H-Honey? Pretty sure that was just a dream. More importantly, did you have a dream with a dragon in it?"

"A dream...? Right, it was all a dream. But a dragon? I didn't see one," answered Peesa while touching her face. If she hadn't seen a dragon, maybe he really had just been dreaming?

"So, where is this...? Did you take me here, Darling?"

"U-Uhhh, let's just get out of here as soon as we can. I've got a bad feeling about this."

"Huh...? Okay, let's hide in that room over there." Peesa pointed at the same room where a dragon had appeared in Garbo's dream.

"I don't know about that room."

"But there are footsteps coming this way, and a lot of them." Garbo could hear the footsteps too. There really were a lot of them. And they were very heavy, enough to make the hallway vibrate.

...If Peesa didn't remember anything, maybe it really was a dream. Not to mention that if it wasn't a dream, he would be dead already. Garbo pessimistically steeled his resolve and decided to flee into the room. The fact no treasure chest was in the room sealed the deal.

"Don't let your guard down, Honey. Keep an eye on the ceiling."

"Ceiling? There's nothing there. What are you so worried about, Darling?"

"A dragon, basically. I'm thinking this might be a Boss Room."

“...I don’t know about the dragon, but the Boss Room part might be right.” There was another door further inside the room. That matched what he had seen in his dream.

“...That door is probably locked. And it doesn’t have a keyhole.”

“Wha? You can tell all that from here?”

“I’ll stick by the entrance door while you check it out.”

“Fine, but... You’re being weird, Darling.” Peesa went to check the inner door, and the moment she did—

“GUAAAAAAAAAH!” A metallic roar that hurt the ears. An iron dragon appeared out of nowhere, as if it had somehow been hiding itself in the room. It looked just like it had in his nightmare.

“Ah...! AAAAAAAAAH!”

“Darling?!”

Garbo fled on the spot. He abandoned Peesa and dashed out the room, only to find himself faced with a horde of countless Iron Golems blocking each direction of the hall.

“Please go back inside.” She was hard to see amid all the golems, but the dog-eared slave was there. For some reason, she made Garbo tremble in fear. It was pretty odd to see a fully equipped adult adventurer afraid of an innocuous-looking brown skinned loli.

“This is strange, his memories should be gone... Kosaki? Did you do your job properly?”

“I diiid, but I guess after five times it’s getting too hard to erase them all. Not to mention that it’s already especially difficult to erase the thick, fearful memories born during near-death experiences.”

“...Understood. That is unfortunate, as Master still wishes to test the dragon.” Test? Master? Was she talking about the blue haired gi—no, doll? Or the dragon? He couldn’t keep up.

“What’s going on?! What’s your goal here?!”

“Finishing a test. I guess we should take the extra time to erase his memories completely. Don’t worry, you’ve already experienced your arm being ripped off and healed back into place. You’ll be fine, so face the dragon without fear... Kosaki, possess me.”

“You got it! Possession start...! And, complete! Fusiooooo!”

* * *

“GAAAAH! Wait... What?” When Garbo woke up, he was in some stone hallway. Peesa was with him. His body didn’t hurt, and Peesa was sleeping soundly.

“Huh? Oh, it was all a dream. What a weird dream... Right, a dream. Wait, what was a dream?” Garbo was struck by confusion, but decided to go ahead and wake Peesa up. He had no way of knowing how many times he had already done just that.

Keima's Perspective

The situation ended with us killing the rookie hunters and disposing of them in the dungeon. As proof, we gave the girl's guild card skewers to the Adventurer's Guild; the receptionist was very grateful. We got details about their "collections" through Niku, who charmed them as the Succubus Puppy and got them to spill the beans. *Me? Yeah, I'm never transforming into a Succubus again.*

Also, we hadn't seen them during the initial ambush, but there were skewers for G-Rank cards as well, the lowest rank of the Guild. Yes, skewers. Three of them. *And while we're on this subject, why was that guy making a collection of dead body parts? Like ears and fingers and other, uh, protruding things. I burned all of them, sheesh.*

"...Judging by the older cards, they began their journey in the Holy Kingdom and came to Laverio through Daide. There are quite a lot of the cards here. But thankfully, there don't appear to be any members of nobility here that might have posed any problems. That is a relief."

Wait, so that's what the Guild was worried about? Or maybe they're just glad they don't have to deal with them. "There was no evidence of nobles being harmed, so it would be safe to say none were. Therefore, we don't have to do as much work, which is a relief." Something like that.

They did reward us for our efforts. *Well, I don't need it, but hey. I'll take it. Gotta split it with Maiodore to thank her for her help. Since she's an adventurer and all now.*

* * *

Now, back to how we dealt with the captured rookie hunters. We just told the Guild that we killed them and let the Dungeon eat their corpses, but in truth they were still alive.

"What's your plan, Keima?" asked Rokuko. "You're not going to let them leave alive, I bet."

"Of course not. They will pay for the crime of targeting my dakimakura with their lives."

"So you're going to make a human farm, then? Bury them in walls or something so they can earn us DP?"

Meh, two more people earning DP is just a drop in the puddle now. We've got a whole town out there. Suzuki being buried in the walls is more than enough for me.

"I'm gonna have them be our dungeon testers for now. Or rather, they already are."

"Testers?"

"Basically, I'm gonna have them do live tests of traps and Dungeon Bosses to see how they hold up."

“Oh, I get it.”

Despite having fleshed out the dungeon, only the black wolf Rin and the High Priestess Alca had reached the deepest levels. Our dungeon was fatally lacking in experience with real people, excluding the beginner-friendly labyrinth.

I had made the Haniwa Golem, the Iron Haniwa Golem, and the new trap-filled Dragon Golem. I was having Niku and Ichika test them out already, but I always had to hold back with them. Because they would die if I didn't. Although I was using golems to perform some tests, experience fighting actual people would objectively be the most valuable to have. There were also a lot of traps I had made that I wanted to ascertain the effectiveness of, like a hallway with glass hidden inside oily water. *Might as well make use of the C-Ranks while I have them.*

“They're also giving good practice for Niku and Kosaki's Succubus possession.” Our dungeon's ultimate weapon was the Succubus Puppy. Normally I'd have to be very careful about experimenting with it, but that hesitation wasn't necessary with prisoners on death row.

The best results would come from the duo facing the challenges with fresh eyes, not legs trembling in traumatized terror. If charming enabled memory manipulation that would make that possible, how could I not do it? Even in the one in a million chance the charming failed and they attacked, Niku was definitely strong enough to fight them off. We had already tried it out once when gathering evidence, and the results were out of this world. When I got some spare time I would repurpose the items and gold they gave us as dungeon treasure.

I could even experiment with {Healing} to see how bad a wound had to be before it couldn't be healed and death became a certainty. I wanted to get as much experience from them as I could, too. *Though I don't need any more Succubus experience, that's for sure.*

* * *

As time passed, the training intensified. The Dragon Golem, the Haniwa Golems, the traps, and even organized platoons of goblins and golems got their testing in. It got pretty grotesque eventually, but the Restoration Magic practice was very fruitful. We learned that a ripped-off arm could be reattached (as long as it didn't go missing) and a sliced-off finger could be grown back, though it took a lot of mana.

To be fair, the cut-off limbs didn't work properly after being put back on, and they would probably need to go through proper rehabilitation, but we somehow managed to charm them into thinking their limbs were fine, which fixed everything. *Jesus. Charms are so universally powerful they're starting to catch up to {Create Golem}. Succubi sure are scary...*

Naturally, we couldn't manage to grow back a whole arm, so eventually we had to replace the guy's left arm with a Clay Golem prosthetic arm. But through Charms he was convinced it was a normal arm, and the fact it worked fine (albeit a bit stiffly) was honestly scary. There was only so much clay could do, but a prosthetic made of orichalcum might even surpass a normal flesh and blood limb. *Not that I'm ever going to try that.*

Anyway. My initial plan was to beat them half to death, heal them, and erase their memories once for each guild card on the skewers, but it seemed that we were about to reach the limits of what Restoration Magic could accomplish. Who knew how much longer they would last at thi— *Woah! The girl just got hit by the Dragon Golem's fire breath (flamethrower trap) head on. Dang, she burned right up. Maybe some of the oil soaked into her clothes? Still, I don't know if that explains how only her bones are left. Rest in peace... If she could come back from this, I'd be terrified. Guess I should have held the dragon back a bit more... Oh well. Can't say I didn't expect this after the Charms started to destroy her brain from the memory loss and stuff.*

"G-GAAAAH! No, no, I don't wanna diiiiie! Bluuuh, guuuh, m-my aaarm... What, it's made of clay?! What's going on?! WHERE'S MY AAAAARM!"

Looks like he's reaching his limit too, I thought before making his Clay Golem arm mercy kill him.

The DP flowed right into our stockpile. It was an inglorious and sudden death for them, as expected given how many times we had looped the encounter. The girl was burned to death too, leaving only bones, so... Hm.

"Seems like you two can still be useful to me after death," I said while summoning their bones to my location. At the time I had seen so much gruesome gore over the course of my Restoration Magic testing that I was a little emotionally numb. *Yeah, that's all it was.*

* * *

"Hyaaaah! Take this!"

"Uraaah!"

A number of days later, at the Adventurer's Guild Goren Town Branch's training room, there were two Skeletons serving as training dummies for rookies. They had foam weapons, and indeed, they were the result of me turning Peesa and Garbo's bones into golems. Garbo's left arm was made from iron instead.

The two Skeleton Golems were treated as provisional members of the guild to help rookies learn to fight. The foam weapons and armor were laughably harmless from the perspective of a veteran, but they were important practice for rookies. Our dungeon produced a

regular supply of goblins, and thus many newbie adventurers gathered to get their feet wet with combat practice. Thanks to that, the Skeletons ended up pretty popular.

I didn't know who named them, but apparently they were called Puji and Roda now. I also didn't know what those names meant, nor which name belonged to which Skeleton. Maybe Puji and Roda were cliché fake names, like John Doe or something.

I talked to the receptionist, who was watching the rookies train.

"How're they holding up?"

"Ah, Keima. Once again you have brought us something quite interesting. Skeleton slaves, correct?"

"Yep, found 'em deep in the dungeon. They seem to match the description of two criminals discussed in the Beddhist bible." To prepare for this, I wrote in the Beddhist bible that one death sentence for heretics was to be turned into a Skeleton slave that would work tirelessly with no sleep and no pay. *Oh man, so terrifying.*

"I hear that they work well together and occasionally launch sudden, precise attacks that keep the fighting tense and productive. If they were once adventurers they would have been at least D-Rank, or perhaps C-Rank."

"I see, so they're decent fighters?"

"Yes. Training with them is very fruitful. But their movements make me question if they could possibly be the rookie hunters you dealt with a few days ago, as ridiculous as that might sound."

Yep, classic receptionist. Sharp as ever. Kinda spooked me out for a second there.

We watched the Skeletons for a bit, observing the cycle of them beating up rookies then being beat up themselves. Well, y'know. They hunted rookies for so long I thought it made sense for them to work for the sake of helping rookies. *Keep it up until your bones turn to dust.*

Chapter 2 — Isam's Side

Two beastkin siblings were arduously traveling along the road to Goren from Pavella. The older brother was Isam, and the little sister was Mimiko. They were two former party members of Ichika (old name: Sorin).

Why were the two of them there instead of in Goren? Allow me to describe Isam's thought process. "Pretty sure a merchant bought Sorin! I'm gonna go settle things with him!" → "Wha? This is just a branch office? Where's the main office?" → "Pavella you say? Let's go, Mimiko!" → "The president Dyne is on a business trip right now? Alright, we'll wait while doing work in Pavella!" → "...What's taking him?! And where'd he go?!" → "Wait, what? He's running a branch store in Goren?! Say that first! Let's go, Mimiko!" → (You are here now).

To save on money, they weren't using a carriage. Being frugal was important to them since they didn't know how much it would cost to free Ichika.

"Isam, why do you always have to jump to conclusiooons..."

"I-I mean, Sorin was right there! I got excited."

"...You mean Ichika?"

"No! Sorin is Sorin! I don't care about any slave name she got!"

Isam turned his head sharply.

Mimiko sighed. Most races didn't have that much of an attachment to their names. Really, it would be fair to say that beastkin were abnormally obsessed with their names. The only people out there that cared this much about their names were beastkins, gods, and demons.

"...I mean, Ichika said she wanted us to call her that. It'd be rude not to."

"...Still, her original name is more important. It has to be." Even Isam knew that it was rude not to call someone by what they wanted to be called. But Ichika was important to Isam and he wanted to call her Sorin. He just couldn't stand to call her by a name that some random guy forced onto her.

"Ichika looked pretty happy there, you know."

"No way would she be happy as a slave!"

In the first place, it took a lot of luck just to get back to being a commoner after falling into slavery. The only ones who properly

managed to escape from such a life were those contract slaves who had signed a contract ahead of time.

Slaves could roughly be split into four types: contract slaves, debt slaves, convict slaves, and war slaves.

Contract slaves became slaves after signing a contract. They worked as slaves for a set period of time, and many of them were freed upon the death of their master. Such contracts were often given to mistresses and the like. This was the broadest category.

Debt slaves were those who fell into slavery due to debt. They could escape slavery by paying back their debt. But most slaves weren't given any wages, and what belonged to a slave belonged to their master. That included wages earned through work, so they could rarely keep savings of their own.

Convict slaves became slaves after committing one or more crimes. Their enslavement would end after a set period of time. But anyone who would commit a crime bad enough to be enslaved would generally get worked to death long before it ended. Most weren't even given a set amount.

War slaves were those who became slaves after being captured during a war. They could be freed if their master wished it and the state accepted it. But there were practically no masters who would go out of their way to petition to the state just to free their property.

...So, in short, anyone who fell into slavery outside of contract slaves would never escape without outside help. There were also illegal slaves, people who were turned into slaves through unlawful means. Kidnapped orphans and people attacked by bandits fell into this category, but given the circumstances, they didn't get to be treated as war slaves. If you went up to the authorities and said, "A merchant got kidnapped by bandits and enslaved. He's being kept in their hideout," if they didn't move to free him, he would be treated basically like a normal slave for all practical purposes. Incidentally, if someone managed to free such an illegal slave (and said someone had a good heart), they could take him to a soldier garrison or some such to get the collar removed.

"We heard that Sorin fell into slavery from debt. That means we can free her if we just pay back that debt. Once that happens, her name will be Sorin again."

"...You know, I've always wondered, how did she even end up in debt? Despite everything, Ichika was always really responsible."

"Gambling and food."

"Aaah..... B-But, still, it's definitely weird that she went so far she ended up in debt..."

For a second Mimiko nearly agreed, but even with her love of food in mind, Ichika had always known how to show restraint. It

wasn't impossible she had undergone a personality shift somehow after she left their party, but the chances of that felt really low.

"It doesn't feel right to me either, but... We can talk about this after settling things with that Dyne guy."

"I think it would be better if you just heard what Ichika had to say..."

"She's not gonna be able to say anything that'll be inconvenient for her master! C'mon, we gotta save Sorin as fast as possible! Let's go!" said Isam, speeding up his pace.

"...You jumping to conclusions has already slowed us down by days and days."

"A-And that's why we need to speed it up!"

Mimiko sighed and followed after her brother.

Keima's Perspective

Things calmed down a lot after the rookie hunting incident was over and done with. And yet, for some reason, Maiodore had summoned me to the space behind the inn to have tea. She had a table with chairs set up and everything. Niku was there, of course, as her fiancée. Rokuko came too, dead set on making sure everyone knew I was her partner. *Well... The weather's nice enough today. Might as well have a bit of tea before an afternoon nap.*

"That certainly was quite the event, wasn't it?"

"...Oh, the rookie hunter incident?" I replied while drinking tea.

"Yeah, that was kinda nasty."

"I believe I have grown much from my experience with them. I knew that coming to this town would be for my benefit," said Maiodore while gulping down her cup of tea in a single go. She and her maid had expertly served as decoys to lure the rookie hunters into a trap.

"Rei's use of her illusion skill was nothing short of spectacular. I would expect nothing less from the High Priestess of Beddhism."

"Heheh, yup, our Rei sure is something else. Right, Keima?"

Rokuko looked proud despite the fact Rei had been praised, not her. Though given that Rei was a dungeon monster, one might say that praise for her was indirect praise for Rokuko, the Dungeon Core. Or maybe she was just proud of her church's High Priestess, as a fellow Beddhist. Either way was fine, really.

"Kuro sure pulled her weight, too. Right, Kuro?"

"...I didn't do anything special. I just did what I was told to." She remained expressionless, but her tail was wagging enthusiastically.

"No need to be humble, Kuro. I am proud to be your fiancée."

Maiodore, in contrast, smiled warmly.

Hmm... Their engagement was a sham made up just so I could get my hands on the Divine Bedding, but they actually seem like they could be a good couple. Too bad they're both girls. Though actually, there are magic drugs out there that would make the gender gap a non-issue, practically speaking. Can't forget that this is a fantasy world. Woohoo, fantasy worlds! Gender freedom! We owe it all to you, Leona!

"Oh yeah, by the way. Have you gotten used to rural town life yet?"

"Yes, very much so. Kuusan the noble carpenter built me a home, and Kuro has graciously introduced me to everyone."

...Despite the fact that the engagement had been made with every expectation of being canceled later, she introduced herself with the line, "Hello, I am Maiodore Tsia, Kuro's future wife," to everyone she met. No doubt about eighty percent of people thought, "Wait, Kuro was a guy?!" after hearing that. The other twenty percent either knew about the gender mixing drug, thought that Maiodore was an unusually cute guy, or immediately declared, "Girls loving girls is the best thing in the world!" I knew all this thanks to Niku and Maiodore giving me a detailed report.

I didn't feel like correcting everyone, but it did seem that the majority of people now thought that Niku was a guy. People who knew me since before I started calling her Kuro in public all looked at me as if they finally understood something that had been stuck in the corner of their minds. I didn't get them at all. I mean, it probably had to do with how the word Niku meant sex slave for girls and meat shields for men, but I would rather them not misunderstand even more about me.

"Everyone is treating me very well here."

"...Well, you are a noble. I don't think anyone would be jumping to disrespect you." Though now that I thought about it, nobody was commenting on how a slave was engaged to a noble. Maybe it was common for people to embrace slavery so they could marry the one they loved, or maybe rich people had a tendency to offer their slaves to each other as presents.

"That helps, but I believe it is because you allowed me to participate in resolving the rookie hunter incident. Thanks to that, everyone has begun inviting me to meals where they shower me with fried potatoes and the like." Maiodore smiled brightly. It was true that eating together with people strengthened your bonds with them. Not to mention that Maiodore was casual enough about her nobility that she even played with orphans in the orphanage.

"I'm surprised your maid lets you do that."

"Aha, she certainly has scolded me for behaving improperly. But I emerged victorious after explaining that I came to Goren specifically

to mingle with the people and learn much about life.”

“Makes sense. Guess that’s why she’s been looking uncomfortable this whole time.”

“Despite appearances, Sheena is of noble descent as well.”

Oh crap, really? I thought she was a commoner... But I guess that Maiodore’s so high status that even her servants need to be nobility as well. Archdukes are serious business.

“Oh really?” said Rokuko. “But your maid always grabs food for herself when working part-time in our cafeteria. I’m surprised she’d scold you for doing the same thing she does.”

The maid averted her gaze. *Like master like servant, huh?*

“Master!” Suddenly, Ichika came rushing towards us. *Huh, I thought Ichika was off today.*

“Sup, Ichika. Something happen?”

“Whew, nice. Guess he’s not here yet... Dude, remember those old party members of mine I was talking about? They’re back, and the brother’s pissed.”

“Yeah?”

“So like, I was doing some part-time work in the Dyne Company when he raced off to the inn to talk to the person who bought me. Didn’t even listen to a word I said, the jerk.”

“I see.” *So basically, he’s waiting in the inn for me. Yeah... Guess I can just go straight back to my room in the chief residence and avoid the problem! No? Dang.*

“Ah, Ichika,” interjected Maiodore. “You mentioned you were off today, and I understand now that you were merely busy with the Dyne Company. Are you using your wages to buy yourself back?”

“Huh? As if, dude. I’m obvs just dumping it on all the slot machines.”

“What?” Maiodore blinked in surprise.

“Keima is paying you and his other workers, yes?”

“Yup.”

“Why not save that money to pay off your debt?”

“Huh? Dude, what? That’d be a total waste of money.” Ichika tilted her head in confusion. She knew that I had no intention of letting her go free and that I would provide her with all sorts of delicious food, such as curry rolls, as long as she stayed. On top of that, she lived within walking distance from choice gambling spots such as the bar with the slot machines. Even if she wasted every copper to her name gambling, she could eat Kinue’s home cooking for free. Her ideal lifestyle was guaranteed nigh unconditionally.

“So basically, dude, this place is heaven for me. No way am I gonna quit being a slave.”

“...T-To each their own, I suppose.”

“It helps that Master is kinda a super special case, if you catch my drift.” Ichika puffed out her sizable chest with pride. So did Rokuko, for some reason, before throwing in some comments of her own.

“You know, Ichika, it’s kinda funny that you’re still gambling even though that’s what got you enslaved. I don’t think I could do the same in your shoes.”

“Well, I am holding back a little, y’know? Can’t exactly fall into slavery a second time, so... I think you’ll get me if you try gambling a little, Rokuko. The thrills you get are just, mmnnn.”

“Drop it, I’ll lose everything I have if Rokuko starts gambling.” We were talking about someone who consistently got top-tier items from the consistently regarded as trash Dungeon Point Gacha. It was thanks to her luck that I was here in the first place, after all.

“Wait, Ichika. Don’t you need to get back to work soon?”

“Dude, absolutely. Later! Be careful, Master!” said Ichika before dashing away again.

...I took another sip of tea.

“Anyway, where were we?”

“Keima? Do you not have Ichika’s former party member waiting for you?”

“I don’t wanna deal with that guy. If he’s got that much beef with me, he’ll come talk to me himself. The Beddhist bible states that anything you can do after a nap doesn’t need to be done immediately. Thus, I will sleep until he comes to me.”

“Oh, I see. That is a profound nugget of wisdom.”

Yeah, I’ll write it down later.

And so, despite all of us preparing for a sudden intrusion at any moment, the tea party ended without a hitch. I even poked my head in the inn and saw that nobody was waiting for me. According to the tiny Silky sitting behind the counter, he had gone right back to the Dyne Company after getting a room and putting his stuff down.

“Seems like that idiot thought that the owner of the Dyne Company bought me, not you. He was negotiating for me with Dyne himself.”

Well, that explains why he didn’t come looking for me.

“Huh. That’s a pretty big misunderstanding. So, how’d it go? Did he buy you?”

“Course not! Dyne said, ‘Our workers aren’t for sale, moron! Get out!’ and chased him away.” After that, he apparently tried waiting outside the store until Ichika’s shift was over, only to get chased away. He then went to the dungeon to earn money.

“He may not look it, but that dog’s hella stubborn... Wait, maybe he does look it? But anyway, he’s not gonna give up on me so easily. How’re you gonna handle this?”

“Ehhhh.” Dyne was an important source of income for our town. He was a good guy who took a little money and gave back more money. Most of the town’s operating funds came from him. He would bring it up when he didn’t have enough, but outside of special events that normally wasn’t an issue.

“I don’t want that guy getting in Dyne’s way too much. If he keeps being a pain you can just spill the beans that I’m your master. Tell Dyne the same thing.”

“Dude, really? I totally thought you were gonna let Dyne take the fall so you could keep napping.”

Just what kind of person do you think I am? I mean, I considered that possibility, but still.

“Eh, he’ll figure it out on his own if he does a little research. I guess he’ll notice before you have the opportunity to tell him.”

“Kay. Later then, I’ll keep you updated.”

“Thanks.” I tossed Ichika a curry roll. Her payment for the report.

“Kyaaaah! I love you so much, Master! Marry me, sleep with me!”

“Not sure I want love cheap enough to be bought with a curry roll.”

“C’mon, Master, you know I’d only ever say that to you. Lateeeers.” Ichika left my room with a tiny wave, curry roll in her other hand.

Isam’s Perspective

“...So basically, that’s why I wanna free Sorin. Can’t you strike a deal with me?”

“Huh. Didn’t know you were in shit that deep, dude.” Isam returned to the Dyne Company again. This time, he brought the corpse of an Iron Golem he hunted to sell and show that he wasn’t just a rabble rouser. His efforts were rewarded, as unlike last time, Dyne heard him out without giving him the boot immediately.

“I get it, but why’re you talking to me about this?”

“Wha? Aren’t you Sorin’s master?” Isam replied to Dyne’s question with another one.

“Dude dude dude, no way. Where’d you get that idea? I’m not her master and I’ve never been.”

“...W-Wait, really? I heard Sorin was bought from someone here, so I thought for sure it’d be a merchant.”

“You gotta think a little more before you act, my man. Ichika’s owned by the town chief of Goren. Talking to me isn’t gonna help at all.”

“Oh, wow...” That was something everyone in Goren knew, but it was a shocking revelation to Isam. “Guess that’s why she’s working in

the inn and this store.”

“Pretty much,” replied Dyne while continuing to appraise the Iron Golem. Isam watched him while falling into thought.

“...What do you think I should do?”

“I dunno, man. I wanna help ’cause I get what you’re going through, but I owe a hella lot to the town chief. Guess you should go talk to him. His name’s Keima.”

“Keima... Where is he?”

“Uhhh, well. The barkeep Wozma should know. He’s the vice chief.”

“Alright! Thanks.” Isam thanked him politely. Dyne decided to be generous with his appraisal.

After getting paid for his Iron Golem, Isam went to the bar. It was right next to the Adventurer’s Guild and the dungeon, so he found it immediately. The inn where he found Ichika working was close by as well.

“Hey, is the barkeep here? I’ve got some questions to ask.” The moment Isam walked into the bar and announced his intentions, a dwarf smelling of beer called out to him.

“Hey, what’s with you? Don’t think I’ve seen you around.”

“I’ve gotta talk with the town chief of this place, and I was told the barkeep here knows where he is.”

“Aaah, yeah, it’s always hard to get a hold of that Keima... Well, Wozma’s that guy behind the counter over there.”

“Alright, thanks.” Isam sat down at an open seat by the counter and ordered a drink before asking his question.

“Water and something to eat, please.” As an aside, Isam didn’t drink alcohol. He was old enough to drink if he wanted to, but since he was always saving up money to buy Ichika back one day, he never really chose to when the opportunity arose.

“How about some fried food? It’s chicken fried in oil.”

“Fried in oil...? That sounds expensive. I don’t have that much money.”

“Only five coppers. It’s cheap since we make them in bulk.”

“Alright, I’ll go with that, then.”

And so, out came the fried food. It was golden-brown and smelled fantastic, probably due to them adding a bit of garlic.

“Nom nom, nom! Oh, oooh! This tastes so good! I gotta bring some back for my sister.”

“Would you like to order another plate, then? But before that, I believe you wished to talk to me about something.” Wozma, the well-dressed barkeep, must have heard everything Isam said. He was looking at him with a faint smile.

“Nmm, yeah, the truth is...” Isam told Wozma all the details. In

order to save his former party member who fell into slavery over debt, he wanted to talk to her current owner — Keima, the town chief. Wozma's expression immediately darkened after hearing that.

"...That Sorin you speak of is Ichika, yes?"

"Yeah, sounds like that's the name he gave her. But she'll go back to her real name once I save her, so I'm still calling her Sorin."

"I believe it would be best if you gave up on her."

Isam's wolf ears twitched unhappily.

"I'm not gonna give up! I've finally found Sorin, I'm not gonna abandon her now!"

"...Very well. If you insist, I will talk to Keima and arrange a meeting. He is quite the compassionate fellow. I'm sure he will hear you out."

Wozma remained calm with Isam despite his shouting. That calm demeanor made Isam feel as if he was just a child in an adult's body. He asked for another glass of water to cool down.

"...Yeah, I appreciate it. How should I thank you?"

"Order another plate for your sister. Fried food is good even when cold," said Wozma with a smile.

Isam decided to order another plate. When he got back to the inn Mimiko would lecture the hell out of him for all he had done, but between you and me, he managed to narrowly escape with his life thanks to the fried food he brought with him.

Keima's Perspective

I was in the chief residence's parlor, face to face with Ichika's former party member Isam.

"So you're Sorin's current master, huh? I've finally found you." He had apparently gone on lengthy detours since first finding Ichika. It had taken him so much time to reach me I honestly wanted to joke about that with him. He just charged forward on assumptions, never double checking his information or anything like that. Just how much time could he have saved by just asking Ichika who her master was?

"You sure threw me for a loop. Hope that time you saved by tricking me was worth it."

Uh, no, you did all that yourself.

"Don't blame me for your own mistakes. But anyway, what are you here for?"

"I'll get straight to the point. Free Sorin, or sell her to me."

"Sorin? Who's that? Sorry, you might have the wrong guy." That was probably Ichika's old name, but I pretended not to know what he meant. I honestly hadn't heard it before. As far as I could remember, Ichika had never mentioned it to me.

“Don’t play dumb! She’s a slave of yours!”

“Hm. Doesn’t ring a bell.”

“Drop the act already! It’s Sorin!”

“Try using your head for a second. I’ve got more than one slave. Understand?”

“Ngh!” choked out Isam before briefly falling silent. It seemed he hadn’t known that.

Though, to be fair, I only have two.

“...I’m talking about the one that goes by Ichika now!”

“Oh, Sorin was her old name? First time I’m hearing that. She didn’t mention it when I was naming her. But still, I’ll keep calling her Ichika.”

“Hmph, I don’t wanna call her by a trashy, dumb name like Ichika.”

“She picked that name herself, y’know. She really likes it. Pretty sure she came up with it by mixing the God of Food’s name with some other thing or another. I think.”

“...It’s a clever name. Good thinking, Sorin.”

Wow, fast recovery. You could’ve held your ground a little longer, y’know.

“Anyway, either let Sorin go or sell her to me!”

“No to both. Leave and don’t ever show your face here again.”

“Huh...? You want me to wear a mask or something?”

“Uhhh, er, no. Forget I said that. Basically, I’m saying no.” It had been a long time since the auto-translator busted my back like that, but I kept going with only a slight recovery. To be honest, I could get rid of Isam using my status as a noble at any point I wanted. Or I could use my authority as town chief to banish him from the town, with the Guild’s backing. But I had stuck both feet in the dark side during the rookie hunters incident, and lately I was trying to minimize my use of authority so as to not become a ruthless dictator. My ultimate goal was peace.

“Ichika’s an important employee of mine. I can’t let her quit.”

“I’ll pay for her! As much as you want!”

“No amount of money would be enough. But I’ll throw you a bone and say if you save up about eighty thousand gold coins, I’ll at least consider it.” Eighty thousand golds. The second I said that, Isam’s eyes shot wide open. Also, to be clear, I said I would consider it. Not actually sell her.

“You’re trying to rip me off...!”

“Is that all you have to say? Get outta here. I’m busy.” I clapped my hands and Ichika came inside.

“Hellooo. Did you call for me, Master?”

“Wha, S-Sorin?! Why are you here?”

“Cause she’s my slave. Why wouldn’t she be here? But anyway, Ichika. It’s time for this guy to leave. Send him outside for me.”

Ichika stood the panicking Isam up and dragged him out the door, saying, “C’m on, punk, get a move on.”

I feel like she’s not always this, uh, aggressive...

“H-Hold on. Sorin, I’m doing this for your sake!”

“HUH?! Who the crap cares about me and my trashy dumb name, huh?! Get the heck outta here!”

“Y-You heard that?! I-I mean, uh, it was just a figure of speech.”

“Quit acting dumb, Isam. I told you to start calling me Ichika. Why’re you dragging this out? You using that name, knowing I hated it? You picking a fight? I’ll take you up on that. I’ll beat you down, son.”

Oh, she hated her old name. First time I’m hearing that.

“You hated that name?! I had no idea... alright, I’ll call you Ichika! Okay!”

“Tch, too late for that, idiot! Shoulda put on a mask before coming here!”

“I don’t understand the masks!”

“Me neither, punk! But Master said it so now I am!”

Auto translator, please, do a better job. You’re teaching my slave to say weird things...

“...A-A duel! I challenge you to a duel, Keima! If I win, you have to free So-, I mean, I-Ichika!”

“There’s nothing in that for me, so no.”

Ichika ultimately finished dragging him outside and that was that. I opened up the potential for ripping him off for huge amounts of gold like I did with Wataru, but luckily enough for him, this week was a “good person” week. Otherwise he might not have left alive.

But the next day, Isam was camped out in front of my place.

“I challenge you to a duel!”

“Like I said, there’s nothing in that for me. Why would I accept?” I ignored Isam and headed to the church. There was mass today... but Isam blocked my path.

“...I’m pretty busy right now, y’know. Could you get out of my way?”

“Only if you accept the duel.”

Looks like he’s not gonna move... What a pain. Guess I’ll use this as an excuse to skip work.

“Heeey, anyone here that can pass on a message for me?”

“Yes! Nicole is here and ready!”

I yelled out for a messenger and Nicole, one of the Silky triplets, arrived immediately. *That’s a Silky for you, always ready to help at home. And uh... Was the one with a red ribbon always Nicole?*

“Someone’s getting in my way and I’m not gonna make it to mass. Tell Suilla that for me.”

“Yes! Understood!” Nicole dashed off, full of energy.

Perfect. Time to leave.

“Wait, wait, wait. If you just canceled your plans you’re not busy anymore, yeah? Duel me already.” Isam firmly grabbed my shoulder.

Ugh, don’t get your fur all over me. It’s already way too hot. At least come during the winter.

“Tch, back off, buddy. I’m busy sleeping.”

“Don’t friggin’ go to sleep!”

“We Beddhists pray by going to sleep, y’know. I’m a loyal member of Beddhism and thus can’t fight at full capacity unless I sleep twenty-five hours a day.”

“Uh. There’s only twenty-four hours in a day, dude. Are you feeling alright?”

Oh man, now he’s worried about me.

“Nah, feeling kinda sick actually. That’s why I need to sleep.”

“Alright. Take good care of yourself. I heard you’re an adventurer too, and our bodies are our lives.” Isam sat back down on the ground as he spoke.

Go home, please, I thought while returning to my room. Once there, I went straight to bed.

The first day, well, it was fine. I could live with one day. But Isam got in my way once again the next day.

“Hey! I asked around and it turns out you’re not busy at all! You just sleep all day!”

“Who’s spreading those filthy, filthy lies? They just don’t realize what hard work it is to sleep all day. It’s so much work I’m constantly busy.”

“Quit messing around!” Isam grabbed the chest of my shirt.

Oh man, so scary. This guy’s a real thug. And trust me, there were two good reasons why I was totally calm despite him grabbing my shirt. First, I was transformed into myself with {Ultra Transformation}, which would revive me if I died. Second, well...

“Hmph.”

“Gah, ow! What’re you doing?”

The strongest person in Goren, my dakimakura Niku Kuroinu, was standing right beside me. She slammed the hilt of her Golem Knife against the back of his hand, making him let go of me.

“What’s with you, kid? Back off, don’t get in my way.”

“.....” Niku shook her head, standing in between us. Who knew such a small girl could be so reliable.

“Oh, right, let me introduce you. This is my dakimakura. The name’s Kuro.”

“...Niku Kuroinu. I am Master’s original slave.” Niku bowed her head without changing expression for a second.

“Enslaving Sorin wasn’t enough for you?! Not even little girls are safe?! And you’re even calling her a niku, too?!”

“Th-There’s a good reason for that. I didn’t name her that myself, alright?” I averted my eyes and Niku let out another hmph.

“...The name Master gave me is my greatest pride.” She then proudly said something she really shouldn’t have.

Niku, please!

“Well? Got anything to say to that?”

“Look, this is a really complex situation. And didn’t Ichika tell you to stop calling her Sorin?”

“Ngh, that’s not important right now! Sorin is precious to me!”

Ohhh, I get it. He ultimately wants to free Sorin because... Wait, I mean. He wants to free Ichika because, deep down inside, he...

“So basically, you’re in love with Ichika. You want to free her because you love her.”

“...Y-Yeah, so what?! Got a problem with that?!”

Oh wow, he sure was quick to admit it.

“Nah. But I do have a problem with losing my slave. Ichika’s too important for me to give up. So, what can we do about this? How about you become my slave too?”

“Wha?! Quit messing around, why would I become your slave?!”

Well, I mean. He’s not gonna keep any secrets unless he’s a slave. I wouldn’t mind him and Ichika working something out as slaves, but... Actually, he would probably let stuff leak whether I enslaved him or not. Time to abandon this idea entirely.

“Yeah, never mind. Forget I said anything. While you’re at it, forget about Ichika.”

“I’ll never give up on her! Just duel me already! If I win, you free Sorin. If you win, I’ll be your slave! How about that?! There’s finally something in it for you!”

“Nah, you seem kinda dumb.”

“Hey! I’m a C-Rank adventurer, y’know! I’ve got tons of experience!”

Ahhh, geez, just leave me alone already. I wish I could skip work again, but Suilla said something about working twice as hard today to make up for missing yesterday. Apparently Maiodore’s father, the Archduke of Tsia, was sneaking into the church to attend mass. He had done so two days in a row. Which meant no matter how much of a pain it was, I had to get to work. I would need to change clothes in the church, too.

“Kuro, could you get this guy out of my way?”

“Yes,” said Niku before pointing her Golem Blade at Isam.

“Uh, don’t kill him.”

“.....” She sheathed her Golem Blade and took out a wooden practice knife.

“Hmph, you don’t know what you’re getting into. You think I’ll hold back ‘cause you’re a kid? I won’t.”

“Okay.”

Niku won in a split second, and I easily made it to the church before mass started. On my way back from church after mass, I found a female furry (by which I mean a fur-covered girl wolfkin) waiting for me. Ichika was with her.

“Huh? What’s up, Ichika?”

“Ahhh, well, Mimiko totes wants to apologize to you.” The moment Ichika said that, the beastkin named Mimiko shot her head down in an incredibly powerful bow. Her body hit a perfect ninety degree angle.

“I’m so sorry! My brother’s been so awful!”

“...Ahhh, you’re Isam’s little sister. Well, uh, don’t sweat it. You don’t need to apologize for him.”

“I’m sorry! My brother is just the worst sometimes!” Mimiko briefly lifted her head, then bowed it again. It wasn’t a rapid back and forth, but rather huge swings up and down.

“Uh, well... Must be rough.”

“Yes... It really is...” Her voice exuded utter exhaustion. I could imagine how much her brother dragged her around while jumping to conclusions and not listening to people.

“So yeah, Master. She’s mega sorry about him getting in the way of yesterday’s mass.”

“He came again this morning, y’know.”

“Wha?! I-I, um, I’m sorry... I don’t know how I can make this up to you. I’m just, so sorry!” Mimiko apologized with all she had. She was lowering her head so fast, I could feel waves of air hitting me.

Isam’s gotta shape up. An older brother shouldn’t be making his little sister go around apologizing for him. But you know, her fur is super fluffy. Kinda heals my soul in a way. She’s way fluffier than her brother. I-Is this a passive charm skill? No way, that’s ridiculous.

Anyway. If I don’t forgive her here, I might accidentally be condemning them to death. That’s fine. It’s still the good week.

“...Alright. In appreciation for your sincere apologies, I will forgive him.”

“Th-Thank you so muuuuch!” Mimiko bowed her head once again.

Doesn’t she know that just makes me want to touch her fluffy tail? Sheesh... Guess I’ll mess with Niku’s tail later.

“...Master, what’s with those pervy eyes? You getting the hots for Mimiko’s tail?”

“Is that what it looks like?” *I don’t think I’m particularly perverted.*

“I get how you feel, but a beastkin’s tail is like a human’s boobs, y’know? Or what, are you gonna punish her with some tail squeezing?”

“Of course not. I already said I’d forgive her.”

“Yay! Lucky you, Mimiko!”

“Hyaaaah?!”

Despite her celebration, Ichika gripped the base of Mimiko’s tail and squeezed hard.

“I-Ichika! Geez!”

“Ahaha! It’s fine, we’re both girls.”

Man, Ichika’s off the chain... Though actually, wait. Girls definitely touch each other’s boobs sometimes, so if tails are like boobs, then what Ichika just did is like on the level of a friendly joke between pals.

“Uhhh, well, looks like my slave is bothering you too. Guess we’re even.”

“Ah... R-Right! Thank you very much!”

“Heh, just what I expected you to say, Master. Everything’s all better now and it’s thanks to me.”

Seriously?

Anyway, Mimiko left looking fairly relieved, although she still insisted on bowing her head repeatedly while leaving.

“...But tails are like boobs, huh? I feel like I’ve touched Niku’s tail more than a few times. Is that sexual harassment?”

“Kinda late to be worrying about that given all the dakimakura stuff, dude, but yes. It’s hella sexual harassment. If you wanna go full on fluffy fluffy without harassing a girl, you gotta summon a monster and try taming it, dude.”

Ehhh, I’ll look into it.

Isam’s Perspective

What was with that little girl...? thought Isam as he recalled the slave he had met today, Niku. She looked like a normal beastkin girl at a glance. She was almost young enough to be called a toddler with a barely developed body, really.

And yet despite her small body, she was stronger, faster, and more agile than Isam. Her small frame even made her a more difficult target to hit. Basically, she was strong. She slipped into his range without any effort then sent him flying before he could attack.

Given her strength, well, it should be safe to say that she had the blessings of the God of Beastkin, the one who originally mixed man and beast — Chaos. After all, her hair was black, the color of the chaos that consumes all. Or maybe she was a hidden child of the Beast

King.

Either way, had Isam challenged Niku to a duel with the stated conditions, he would probably be signing the forms that made him Keima's slave by now. But that would never happen. Isam was an adventurer confident in his skills. He wouldn't let his guard down around her again. He could probably fight back with a little caution. *I won't lose again*, he thought.

But even if that were the case, he would first need to shake the trail of his angry little sister Mimiko.

"Geez, are you even listening to me, Isam?!"

Crap. I totally wasn't.

"Y-Yeah. You're right. I definitely messed up here."

"Really? Do you *really* think you messed up?"

"Absolutely nothing good came from what I did. I'm sorry."

"...Don't let it happen again!" said Mimiko before heading to bed.

Phew. I dunno what she was talking about, but looks like she's settled down.

"Haaah." Isam let out a sigh. He shot up straight after Mimiko murmured "Stop that, I'm the one who wants to sigh." Isam was a warrior and Mimiko was the back row support, but Isam could never manage to end up on top in arguments with her. Well, he knew she wouldn't point a sword at him while he was protecting her, but still. A chill ran down his spine whenever she got mad at him.

"...Alright." After making sure Mimiko had fallen asleep, Isam snuck out of the room. He sniffed the air. As a wolf beastkin, and especially as a wolf beastkin with an entire wolf's head, his nose was much more powerful than an average human's. He was after the scent of Sorin — of Ichika. That said, he had already sniffed out the location of Ichika's room the other day. The question was just whether she was there right now or not.

Luckily, Ichika's room had a window. He snuck around to it and knocked on its wooden pane.

...There wasn't a reply after a decent amount of waiting, so he knocked again.

.....Just as he was about to knock for the third time, the window suddenly opened.

"Dude, who the heck? It's too late for this junk." Ichika stuck her head out the window, looking extremely displeased.

"It's me, Isam."

"Huh? Dude, seriously, it's too late. Good boys and Beddhists should be in bed by now."

With Ichika clearly pissed at him, Isam looked around to make sure no one was nearby before continuing.

"I'm here to rescue you."

“Rescue me from what? I want to be here. Get outta my face.”

“Sor— Ichika! You don’t need to act strong. I’ll protect you!” He started to say Sorin, but corrected himself as she glared at him.

“Dude, what? Is that a confession or something? You sure have grown, my man. Seems like just yesterday you were pissing yourself and crying about it.”

“Wha, i-is now really the time to talk about that? Sheesh, Sori, uh, Ichika! You changed the subject the last time I confessed to you too!”

“Aaah, what were all those things you said? ‘I want to feed you the prey I hunt every day,’ ‘I’ll fill your belly,’ ‘Brush my tail for me,’ and ‘I won’t let anyone but you touch my stomach’? Man, that’s nostalgic.” Ichika laughed at the memory.

“That’s right. What, you remembered it all?”

“Well, that’s... You were just being a dumb kid, yeah?”

“I was serious!”

“Ooooh, dang.” Ichika scratched the back of her head, causing Isam’s fur to shoot up with frustration. There was a clear difference in how invested they were.

“Anywaaay, who cares. I’m Master’s slave now, and I’m definitely not gonna be marrying you. ’Kay, that settles that. Night night.” Ichika started to shut the window with a smile.

“I’m gonna grab you and get out of this place. Follow me!”

“...Get a clue, my dude. I’m gonna let this slide ’cause we go way back, but you’re on thin ice. Leave while you still can.”

“Sorin!” yelled Isam as he grabbed Ichika’s arm to pull her out the window. Or he tried to, anyway.

“I freakin’ told you, call me Ichika now!”

“Gah?!” Ichika slammed her head against his in the most powerful headbutt ever landed.

“You can’t even remember my name, idiot, why are you wasting my time? I’ve got work tomorrow, lemme sleep. And I can’t run away with this collar on, y’know? Try thinking for like a second before you pull this garbo. Sheesh. Night night.” This time, Ichika successfully closed the window.

“L-Looks like I’m not the only one that’s gotten stronger... guh...” Isam fell unconscious on the spot. He was left there on his own until morning came and Mimiko raced to find him, having found the letter Isam left about leaving to rescue Ichika. Thanks to his fur, he didn’t end up sick with a cold or anything.

Rei’s Perspective

It seemed that someone came to abduct Ichika last night. That wasn’t anything to worry about, though. It ended in failure, and even

if it hadn't, Master certainly would not have let that slide. He would have rescued her without fail, just as he had rescued Niku. Master did not take his property being stolen lightly.

If necessary, I would put my own life on the line to save her. Ichika and Niku could only die once, but we monsters could be reborn after being killed. But putting that aside, I was in the middle of massaging a Werewolf-esque beastkin as the High Priestess of Beddhism.

"Ah, your fur certainly is fluffy."

"Haaaah... High Priestess, your massage feels out of this woorld..."

"Ahaha, well, I am not the High Priestess for nothing." It seemed that the beastkin, Mimiko, was one of Ichika's former party members. Which meant they had much to discuss. Yes, very much indeed. *What are Ichika's weak points, in precise terms?! Does she have any weaknesses?! Like an embarrassing past?!*

"I have an idea. As a treat, I will give you the full extended course for no extra charge."

"What?! I-I couldn't ask you to do that."

"You used to be Ichika's party member, after all! This is a special treat, completely special."

"Fhyaah! Ah, aaaah..."

I pressed her pressure points fairly hard. But since I was cursed with having zero attack power, it didn't hurt. *Ahaha, feels good, doesn't it? I know it does. My fame as the High Priestess of massages is not unfounded! I have more experience than most could dream of!*

"Still, given the circumstances, I'm surprised you're here."

"Me toooo, but um, my brother... nmmm, paid for this, to apologize...!"

"Oh, he sounds nice."

"He's a big dummy, who's always bothering peopleee...!"

I stealthily opened my map and checked it. Ichika's old party members were both tagged on it, so I could find them instantly. The brother in question was in the cafeteria. He was probably eating something.

"You know, I would really like to hear about Ichika's past."

"Nmmm! Fwaah... I-I don't think I would have anything special to say."

"Oh no no, even the smallest of things can be surprisingly... well, you know. Aren't there any stories you can remember?"

"Fwaah, w-well, there are a few. Like the time my brotheeeeer, ah, tried confessing to Ichika..."

"Yes! Let me hear that one!"

"Hyaaah!"

Oops, I accidentally went full-force there. Well, it didn't hurt her, so no harm done.

"U-Ummm, well... This was back when Ichika was going by her old name, Sorin, and um, my brother was giving her a meat kebab." Back when Isam was short and his voice hadn't even changed, he confessed to Ichika by saying, "I'll keep you fed every day!" while giving her a kebab that she had just brought to him. Naturally, it hardly held any weight since he was just giving her food she had bought. She laughed it off, thinking he was just a kid being a kid.

As an aside, Ichika was eight years old at the time, whereas Isam was six. Mimiko was just four.

"Oho, I knew you used to be party members, but I didn't know you went *that* far back."

"Mhm. We met when we first went to the imperial capital."

"But you know, it feels like it's fairly normal for kids to propose to each other. Like, let's get married when we're older, or that kind of thing."

"Ahaha, you're not wrong. But my brother was completely serious about it." And as he got older he just got more embarrassed about it, which left him incapable of confessing all the way until the day Ichika finally disappeared. "By the way, he apparently used the line that Mom had proposed to Dad with."

"...Your mom proposed to your dad? By saying she would keep him fed?"

"Yes, so I've heard. My mother's mother... My grandmother was a lion beastkin, so..."

A lion. Lionesses did do most of the hunting for their pack, as I recalled.

"...What an absolutely splendid mother!"

"I'm very proud to be her daughter... Fwaaah." Mimiko let out a sleepy sounding sigh. The massage had apparently tired her out. Massages that don't hurt invite sleepiness instead. With the principles of Beddhism in mind, I couldn't interfere with her falling asleep.

"Sorry, my eyes are just... So heavy..."

"Oh, don't worry. You can sleep if you want to. Plenty of people do."

"Okaaay... Good night, theeen... Nzzz..."

"Yes, oyasuminasai." I didn't know whether it would be useful, but I had gotten my hands on some veery interesting information. *And, well, she fell asleep, but I'll still give her the long course. Just to be nice.*

Isam's Perspective

...Isam went to the cafeteria. His plan was simple. Have a duel, free Ichika. He recalled Ichika saying her collar was a problem as his consciousness slipped away and had interpreted that as her saying, "If you could just get rid of this collar, I would... Oh, what I would do...!" In which case, he needed merely to beat Keima in a duel.

Everything would go perfectly if he just won the duel. It was true that the "dakimakura" (?) girl had beaten him, but that was just because he let his guard down. He would surely win if he was more careful next time. He had a few aces up his metaphorical sleeve.

"The question is how to get him to accept the duel... But I have an idea." Indeed, Isam had an idea. If he just waited at the chief residence's entrance, Keima couldn't avoid him by leaving through the inn or some such. Isam needed to give him a challenge that he couldn't ignore. And a traveling merchant he met by chance at the bar had given him the perfect idea.

"You just have to hurt his reputation as town chief. He won't be able to ignore that."

"Oh?"

"Plus, if you knock him down enough pegs, he'll have to sell his slaves. Thanks to some Heroes, more and more people are thinking that slavery is dehumanizing and that it's wrong to have slaves. Though that'll only work if he's soft enough."

In short, everything would go perfectly if he hurt Keima's reputation. He didn't really understand why, but facts were facts.

"The town chief here is deep in the church and inn, so if you do *this and that* in those places he'll be all yours." He taught Isam all sorts of things to do. And Isam had sent Mimiko to the church to accomplish one of those things. She would just get in his way if they were together.

"Thanks for waiting, here's your food." An employee brought his ordered food to him. The special today seemed to be bread and stew. He had seen this kind of thick white soup being sold in the imperial capital before. Convenient.

While feeling a little bad for the little green-haired girl with a yellow ribbon who had brought him his food, Isam took a small pouch out of his shirt pocket. Inside were the black corpses of bugs known as roaches. They were bugs hated for their association with filth and well known for their cursed breeding speed that meant if you saw one, there were probably thirty of them. The God of Food Ishidaka himself hated them, to the extent there was a legend of him burning down a cafeteria to kill some (another legend said he smoked them out).

Isam dropped a corpse of one of those roaches into the stew. Then, after stirring, he spoke.

"Hey! You trying to feed me roaches or something?!"

“Ah, I’m sorry! What in the world have we done...?” A stir of disgust ran through the cafeteria.

“For real?”

“Hey, that’s the same stew I’m eating!”

“Wait, does that mean you ate one of those bugs...? Eugh!”

There appeared Keima, the town chief. He couldn’t hide his shock at the sudden development.

“Wait, did something happen?”

“Yeah, there was a roach in your stew. Can’t believe you’re trying to feed your customers friggin’ bugs.” Isam approached Keima, who flinched and had no choice but to bow his head.

“My apologies. I don’t want my reputation being hurt by this, so please don’t talk to anyone about it. Here, I’ll accept your duel as an apology. Or actually, I’ll just go ahead and free Sorin.”

That was definitely how things would go down. Word for word. (That was all him fantasizing.)

“Alright, let’s do this thi—” Isam went to drop the roach into his stew... but stopped midway.

...Hold on. Why wasn’t his hand moving? Nobody had grabbed it or anything. He just couldn’t move it for some reason. It was almost as if his own body was stopping him from dropping something into the stew.

There, Isam realized something. Keima had no doubt inflicted him with a devious curse. The same foul magic that was manipulating Ichika was controlling his body. Curse that town chief.

The moment he gave up on putting the roach in the stew, he could move his hand again. *What, can he read my thoughts too?* A shudder ran down Isam’s spine, which sent the bag falling out of his hand. He desperately grabbed it and in the process sent the roach corpse onto the ground.

“Ah!”

“CLEANING TIME!” The child waitress swept up the corpse in no time with her eyes gleaming.

“Come now, Pio! You mustn’t clean things customers drop without permission!”

“Ah! S-Sorry, Captain Kinue. I acted on instinct...”

“I’m not the one you should be apologizing to.”

“R-Right! I’m sorry, Sir!”

“Er, uh, don’t worry about it.” Isam faltered as the kid apologized to him. Even if he wanted to yell about roaches now, the fact he dropped them himself was proof they belonged to him. The fault would be all his, not the inn’s. “It was just trash anyway. I’m glad you cleaned it up.”

“Th-Thank you!”

Isam looked around and saw that the whole place was spotless. There weren't even crumbs on the ground. In a way, the fact a cafeteria for rowdy adventurers wasn't covered with spilled food and drinks was pretty odd. A further look showed that the customers weren't dropping their food much either. There were a few who didn't care about the crumbs, but the tiny waitress would slide beneath the table and clean it all up without anyone even noticing her. The fact the seasoned adventurer didn't notice her cleaning meant there was more to that kid than met the eye. She had skills.

But enough about that. *No point in letting the stew go to waste*, he thought while spooning some into his mouth.

...The soup had such a kind, nostalgic flavor that he was glad he hadn't ruined it with a roach.

Rei's Perspective

"Fwaaah... Oh, sorry, I fell asleep."

"Good morning." Mimiko woke up just as Rei was finishing her massage. That was fairly common among her customers. They probably were waking up because the good feelings from the massage were going away.

"You slept for a very long time. How do you feel?"

"I feel so good I almost can't believe it. My body feels so light...!"

"I am glad to hear it." Rei smiled the smile of a holy woman. At which point she heard a cute whimpering sound coming from Mimiko's stomach.

"S-Sorry... I guess I'm hungry now."

"That is not uncommon for those who just got a massage. Do not worry at all. I recommend you stop by the cafeteria in the Dancing Doll Inn for lunch. Not that there's any other places to eat here, really."

"Ahaha, that's true."

"By the way, there's a lot of girls in the inn who are seriously neat freaks in the cafeteria, so don't make a mess of your food. Well, even if you do, they'll clean it up anyway."

"Oh, I'll be fine. Ichika taught us to clean our plates down to the crumb." Apparently, she would grind her fists against their temples if they ever wasted their food. That actually traumatized them to the point that their bodies would freeze up on instinct if they tried doing anything that would waste food.

"...Even when we cooked for ourselves, she would start yelling if we didn't peel the vegetables as thinly as possible. My brother can eat food that's a little rotten, it doesn't even bother him."

"Wow, that must have been rough." Rei had never been so

strapped for food that she had to eat anything starting to rot, so she couldn't entirely empathize with what they had gone through.

"We bought a smoke bomb from an alchemist once, but apparently it had some pepper inside of it... I couldn't believe it when my brother tried throwing it at a monster and froze mid-fight. He wasn't even conscious of it, but still..."

"Ouch, and that was a matter of life or death. I'm impressed you survived." It was easier for Rei to understand that situation.

"Ah, well, he was actually just having fun in the middle of a difficult hunt. He would be able to throw food if his life depended on it... I think. He can fish, so if he has to waste food at some point, I'm sure he'll be able to." Mimiko smiled weakly. They couldn't test that without putting themselves in life-threatening danger, so there wasn't much she could do.

"Well, my stomach's telling me to get going, so bye for now. Thank you very much for the massage, High Priestess!"

"No probleem, have a nice daaay. Come back soooooon."

Hm. So basically, I can ward off Ichika's attacks by using food as a shield? I should try that out... No way, she'll definitely just beat me up later for playing with food. I won't push my luck. Rei complimented herself for her wise decision, despite the fact that she hadn't really done anything at all.

Isam's Perspective

Isam failed in his attempt to put a roach into his food. But he wasn't one to give up that easily.

"I only failed 'cause of Keima's curse. Everything would have gone perfectly if not for that. But the roaches I went out of my way to buy got thrown away, so I gotta think of my next move... Ah, I've got it! I can get the bathroom dirty on purpose!" He went straight to the inn's shared bathroom. It didn't smell. Or well, Isam could smell waste thanks to his powerful wolf nose, but the bathroom was clearly cleaned thoroughly at least once a day. So much so that the toilet's white porcelain was gleaming.

...What kind of messed up person would try to dirty up a bathroom? realized Isam. Right, peeing everywhere on purpose was what wild animals did to mark their territories. A proud beastkin would never do that. *Yeah, nothing for me to do here.*

Isam used the bathroom normally and got back to thinking about his next move.

"Oh, right! That merchant mentioned something about giving a ridiculous order." Isam hurriedly returned to the cafeteria. He just finished eating, but they wouldn't actually be bringing any food out

since his order was going to be ridiculous. He would be able to complain if they brought out any weird food to serve.

“Let’s see, he said I should... right. Hey! Waitress, I’m ready to order!”

“Okaaay. Oh, welcome back, Mr. Wolf.” The waitress who cleaned up his roaches came walking over.

“Y-Yeah. Uhhh, I wanna eat meat, but I can’t actually eat any meat right now.”

“Wha? But you just ate meat a second ago.”

“Th-Things have changed! Everything’s different now!”

“Um, okay.”

“Anyway, I wanna eat meat that’s not meat! How about it?”

“Ummm, please wait just a second.” Her answer didn’t sound very enthusiastic. After a bit of waiting, a plate of fish was brought to him.

“The heck?! This is fish! This isn’t real meat! I said I wanted to eat meat that’s not meat, not fake meat! Gah, this is what you get!” The sound of a plate shattering filled the air. The reputation of the cafeteria plummeted. Keima came out to do damage control.

“My apologies. I don’t want my reputation being hurt by this, so please don’t talk to anyone about it. Here, I’ll accept your duel as an apology. Or actually, I’ll just go ahead and free Sorin.”

Everything went according to plan... *Okay, maybe that’s a little unreasonable.* (That was all him fantasizing.)

“Basically, I wanna eat meat that’s not meat! Whaddaya have to say about that?” declared Isam, only for the tiny waitress to give him a happy reply.

“I can take that as you wanting to eat meat that’s not from a living animal, right? You’re fine with tofu and vegetables, but not animals?”

“That’s right! Gimme your best shot! But I’m guessing you’re ju—”

“Understood! One vegetarian plate of fried food for five silvers!”

Uh. Wait, that exists? Isam’s eyes widened.

“Wait, hold on!”

“Okay, here it iiis. Our Master, I mean, the town chief added this to the menu since some people would probably want it, but we’ve only gotten like two or three orders.” The meal came out in a single second. The plate was covered in what was unmistakably fried food.

“O-Oh, huh... W-Wait, what is this? I-Is it meat or not?!”

“You’ll know if you try eating it. Your nose seems pretty good, so.”

Isalm fell silent with a grimace. He sniffed the air, and the fried food definitely didn’t smell like animals. He put some of it in his mouth experimentally, then bit down.

It did taste like meat, it really did. It was even seasoned just like the fried food he had eaten there previously. The main thing was it

didn't smell like birds or like any beasts he knew, but... It was meat. He swallowed it down and knew for sure; it was meat, but not the animal meat he knew.

"What is this stuff? What the heck did I eat?!"

"Heh, heh, heh...! This is meat made from tofu, with not an ounce of it coming from any animals! Tasted just like meat, didn't it?! Naturally, we used entirely different oil and pans for it, so there was no contact whatsoever with animal meat! Big sis Kinue dedicated her all to making this as perfect as it could be!" The little waitress girl puffed out her flat chest with pride. Now that she mentioned it, the meat did taste like tofu.

"N-No way. This has gotta be normal meat! It looks so normal!"

"It's apparently called tofu meat, and even Ichika approves of it."

Isam faltered once again. He hadn't expected them to successfully deliver his unreasonable request. *How am I supposed to complain now?! Curse you, town chief!*

"Oh, I forgot to bill for your five silvers. The one flaw of tofu meat is that it comes from the dungeon and is a bit expensive."

Not even his wallet was safe. *CURSE YOU, TOWN CHIEEEEF!*

Isam, having overeaten, left the cafeteria. But he couldn't allow himself to throw up. Five silvers worth of food was in his stomach.

"...I didn't manage to trash the cafeteria's reputation, but food isn't the inn's main business! I just have to say that those comfortable bed things... those uh, futons... are filled with fleas and bedbugs!" Isam immediately headed to the Guild office on the opposite end of the road from the inn. It wasn't too busy since it was already noon, but he saw some newbie-looking adventurers inside. Perfect. Isam grinned and talked to one of them.

"Hey. You a newbie?"

"Huh? Yeah. I was in Tsia and heard there's a dungeon with goblins here, so yeah. They're pretty good for getting some practice."

"Nice. Well, lemme give you some good advice. Watch out if you stay at the inn across the street. Their beds have tons of fleas and bedbugs. You'll be up all night if you don't bring some bugkillers or something."

"Really?! That's great to know. Thanks, stranger."

The nearby adventurers overhead the conversation, and a disgusted atmosphere spread through the Guild like wildfire as they all began trashing on the inn. There appeared Keima, the town chief. He couldn't hide his shock at the sudden development.

"Wait, did something happen?"

"Yeah, the fleas and bedbugs at your inn bit the crap out of me. How am I supposed to work like this?" Isam approached Keima, who flinched and had no choice but to bow his head.

“My apologies. I don’t want my reputation being hurt by this, so please don’t talk to anyone about it. Here, I’ll accept your duel as an apology. Or actually, I’ll just go ahead and free Sorin.”

That was definitely how things would go down. Word for word. (That was all him fantasizing.)

“Alright, let’s get going... Hey. You a newbie?”

“Huh? Yeah. I was in Tsia and heard there’s a dungeon with goblins here, so yeah. They’re pretty good for getting some practice.” Exactly the response he had expected.

“Nice. Well, lemme give you some good advice. Watch out if you stay at the inn across the street. Their beds have tons of fleas and bedbugs. You’ll be up all night if you don’t bring some bugkillers or something.”

“Whoa! Though, uh... Those fleas and bedbugs probably came from you, wolfman.”

“Hey! Take that back! My sister makes me cast {Purification} on myself every single day, I’m not infested with no fleas! It’s all the inn’s fault!”

“I find that unlikely. After all, that is the pope of Beddhism’s inn.” A woman with a clear, sharp voice spoke up. Isam turned toward her and saw that it was the guild receptionist. Why was she here? Wait, that was obvious. They were in the Adventurer’s Guild, of course she would be there.

“The pope of Beddhism? Isn’t that the town chief’s inn?”

“Yes, the town chief is in fact the pope of Beddhism. Which means they use beds supplied by the Beddhist church. They are as obsessed with their bedding as the name of their religion would imply. The employees of the inn clean and use {Purification} on their futons daily to keep them tidy. Even the Archduke of Tsia is fond of the futons there.”

“B-But I mean, I definitely had bedbugs...”

“I dunno, man. Their beds felt great to me, and I didn’t have any bedbugs in mine. You sure they weren’t your own bugs?” asked one of the adventurers, which made Isam realize the horrible truth. No matter how much he insisted there were bugs, nobody who had actually stayed at the inn and slept in a bed without bugs would care. And in reality, Isam’s room didn’t have a futon. They were probably right about the rooms with futons being clean...

“...If you are going to stay at that inn, I recommend you use their onsen on top of {Purification}.”

“Their onsen?”

“Yes. Their onsen. Did the Dancing Doll Inn receptionist not discuss it with you?”

“Right, the onsen! Man, that onsen is great! Did you ignore the

receptionist? It's a big bath, a huge one!" A newbie adventurer got pumped up when the guild receptionist brought up the onsen.

"By bath, you mean like, with water? How's there a bath this deep in the mountain? Is there a river nearby or something?" There were baths in Pavella, plenty of them. But that was because of the large river passing through it. Baths needed a massive excess of water to function. Seemed unreasonable to have one up in the mountains.

"It flows from beneath the ground. We use the same source for the town's water."

Isam could only groan.

"Ngggh... Alright, the onsen. I'll check it out."

"I believe that would be wise."

In truth, Isam had ignored the receptionist since he didn't like baths very much. His whole body was covered in fur; when wet, it all stuck to his body. He hated it. In contrast, his little sister Mimiko loved baths.

But in any case, Isam instinctively knew that it would be unwise to make an enemy of the guild receptionist by continuing to rant about bedbugs and such. Defying the guild receptionist would be defying the Adventurer's Guild. As an adventurer, Isam had to avoid that at any cost.

Which is why he went straight to the onsen. No better time for a bath than right after a big meal.

"This must be the place..." There were bathrobes there, but Isam was a beastkin with fur covering his entire body. There was no need to hide anything from his fellow men. A towel wrapped around his waist was all he needed.

"Oh? Hey, ye're that beastkin from before... uhhh, Isam, right? Didjya manage to talk to Keima?"

"Huh?" Someone else was already in the onsen. It was a dwarf adventurer, the same one he had talked to about Ichika. He smelled like beer, which was a surprise considering how it was still around noon. Either he was loaded with cash or he had given up on living a good life.

"Errr, Gozou, right? Yeah, I talked to him. Your advice was a big help."

"Yeah? How'd it go?"

"...I'm challenging him to duels, but he's not biting."

"Huh." The dwarf took out a small bottle of beer, poured it into what looked like a small plate, then gulped it down. The fact he was portioning the beer out like that implied he probably wasn't loaded.

Isam timidly stuck a foot into the large, wide tub of hot water. He felt his fur float up while he sunk into the water. That was fine, but everything would go downhill fast once he had to get back out of the

tub.

“A duel with Keima? Do ye got a death wish, son? Give it up.”

“Huh? Why? I’m not gonna lose to a coward that makes a little kid fight for him.”

“...If Keima felt like it, ye’d have a debt of two thousand gold coins on yer shoulders right about now.”

“Wha?!” Two thousand gold coins. The sheer scale of that sum hit Isam like a truck. “You’ve gotta be kidding.”

“Nope. Someone once challenged Keima in the past, y’see. They’re still working to pay off that debt. Glug, glug... Fwaah. Mmm, good stuff.”

“W-Wait, no way.” Could it be? Is that why Ichika... No, why Sorin disappeared all that time ago?!

“...It’s the truth. Keima’s got no mercy fer people who challenge him.”

“Ngh!” Isam shuddered. He could never afford to pay back two thousand entire gold coins. His only choices were to die, run, or work as a slave. So, basically, Keima was the worst.

“He’s responsible for Sorin’s debt?! He tricked her like a coward, and now...!”

“Sorin? Who the heck’s that? Hic! Y’know, they’re like... There’s this person... Uhhh, they’re basically like, a member of my party, y’know? They’ve gotta work for Keima, and... Aaah, wish I had some grub...” He probably didn’t remember Isam talking about Sorin in the past due to all the beer. But more importantly, Gozou had a party member working for Keima? Maybe he was talking about that small beastkin girl. That was no normal loli. Keima called her a dakimakura or something.

“...Are you talking about Niku Kuroinu?”

“Huh? Oh man, Niku. Don’t even think about goin’ after her.”

“Right, got it.” Seemed that Niku was Gozou’s party member after all. He would have to remember not to kill her if they ended up fighting again.

“...Aaah, I’m all out. Sheesh, why’s that Keima gotta limit how much beer ye can bring into the onsen? He just ain’t getting it. Anyway, I’m outta here.”

“Alright. Don’t pass out.”

“Gahaha! I’m not the kinda softie that’d pass out from a little beer!” He was no doubt saving up money so he could rescue his party member, just like Isam was. Or maybe he had found some other way to free them. He seemed pretty easygoing.

“...I’ve gotta work hard too!” Isam felt as if he had found an ally fighting through the same struggle he was. (Though he actually hadn’t.)

“Bruh, Mimiko, you gotta be kidding me.”

“I’m not, Ichikaaa!”

Suddenly, Isam heard two girls talking. He turned in the direction of the voices and saw a wall. Or to be more specific, he saw a pile of cut logs stacked into the shape of a wall. He could hear the voices from behind them.

“Just how big are your honkers gonna get?”

“Hyan! Ichika, that’s what I want to ask you...”

He could hear what they were saying if he strained his ears. It sounded like a conversation he shouldn’t be listening to, but the temptation was too strong. There was simply nothing he could do. Or so he told himself, anyway.

...Speaking of which, that traveling merchant had mentioned something about how one could peep into the girl’s bath. For a second he thought about trying it out, but that was Mimiko and Sorin, I mean Ichika, behind the wall. Well, uh, he wasn’t entirely disinterested. But it wouldn’t hurt Keima’s reputation if he looked. At best he could spread a rumor that there was a peeper in the onsen, but the focus of that would quickly shift to who the peeper was and he’d be screwed. He would be dragging himself down with Keima.

So, he decided just to listen.

...*Wait, what am I even doing? Now’s not the time for this.* Isam shook his head. He did honestly want to keep listening, but he decided to leave the onsen instead.

He got out of the bathtub. Just as he had known would happen since before getting in, all of his fur was sticking to his body. It felt disgusting. After making sure nobody was around, he shook his body like an animal to fling off as much water as possible. *Good thing nobody else is here. I don’t wanna get water on anyone, and doing this is super embarrassing.*

He cast {Dry} on himself after shaking the water off. He wasn’t particularly skilled in the spell, but it gave him a nice warm feeling. All he could do after that was use a towel to try and wipe off any of the water that didn’t dry up.

His fur was so dry that things would get messy if he didn’t brush it all before bed. All the fur on his body would stick up in every which way. It sucked.

Gozou’s Perspective

Friggin’ Keima, banning too much beer in the bath. What’s the problem with a little beer? I mean, alright, I went a wee bit too far when I brought a barrel of it with me. But now I’ve gotta deal with a single little jar? Meh... Couldn’t be worse.

Feels kinda like the beer's getting through me better than normal... Hic! Guess it's 'cause this is the good stuff I've been saving for a while. Think it's called daiginjo? Anyway, drinking it bit by bit ain't too bad either. In the middle of my drinking, a buff looking beastkin came walking into the onsen.

"Oh? Hey, ye're that beastkin from before... uhhh, Isam, right? Didja manage to talk to Keima?"

"Huh?"

Pretty sure this is that guy who was talkin' about Keima.

"Errr, Gozou, right? Yeah, I talked to him. Your advice was a big help."

"Yeah? How'd it go?"

"...I'm challenging him to duels, but he's not biting."

"Huh." I gave a half-interested reply while drinking beer. *Yep, this is the stuff. Feels like the smell of beer's mixing with the onsen's steam. Too good... Wait, hold up. Did this guy say somethin' about challenging Keima to a duel?*

"A duel with Keima? Do ye got a death wish, son? Give it up."

"Huh? Why? I'm not gonna lose to a coward that makes a little kid fight for him."

Coward, huh? Can't deny that word fits Keima to a tee. Thing is, though...

"...If Keima felt like it, ye'd have a debt of two thousand gold coins on yer shoulders right about now."

"Wha?!"

Two thousand gold coins. Was it two thousand three hundred, actually? I'm talkin' about the debt he loaded on my comrade Wataru.

"You've gotta be kidding."

"Nope. Someone once challenged Keima in the past, y'see. They're still working to pay off that debt. Glug, glug... Fwaah. Mmm, good stuff." *Yeah, this daiginjo stuff's top class. Doesn't get any better than this. But man, poor Wataru. He's the first poor soul that Keima struck down big-time. Probably worse than turning a corner and running head first into a rotten zombie.*

"W-Wait, no way."

"...It's the truth. Keima's got no mercy fer people who challenge him." *There was even that one Hero, uhhh, Suzuki. Coming to Keima's inn was his last mistake. He got his soul crushed, and he's locked himself up in his room in the capital. Can't say he didn't get what he deserved, though.*

"He's responsible for Sorin's debt?! His tricked her like a coward, and now...!"

"Sorin? Who the heck's that? Hic! Y'know, they're like... There's this person... Uhhh, they're basically like, a member of my party, y'know? They've gotta work for Keima, and... Aaah, wish I had some

grub..." *Feel like I've heard that name before, and from this guy too... Who was it? Eh, whatever. Beer's more important. Ah shit, there's only a wee bit left.*

"...Are you talking about Niku Kuroinu?"

"Huh? Oh man, Niku. Don't even think about goin' after her."

"Right, got it."

Wataru ended up in debt 'cause he was tryin' to free lil' Kuro. What's with all these people lovin' little girls? Ah, I'm outta beer.

"...Aaah, I'm all out. Sheesh, why's that Keima gotta limit how much beer ye can bring into the onsen? He just ain't getting it. Anyway, I'm outta here."

"Alright. Don't pass out."

"Gahaha! I'm not the kinda softie that'd pass out from a little beer!" *This tiny glass ain't enough for me. Guess I'll chug some at the bar... Nah, wait, I gotta be a good Beddhist and take a nap. Then I can drink all evening.*

"...I've gotta work hard too!"

Dunno what he's talking about, but alright. Good to hear him bein' enthusiastic about somethin'.

Isam's Perspective

Isam was in his inn room, looking at a pink potion he had bought from the traveling merchant. The paper with instructions that came with it had "Aphrodisiac" written on it. By the way, the instructions were simple. Have the person you wanted to fall for you drink it, then have them look at you. The aphrodisiac would make them fall in love with whoever they saw while under its effects.

"Hm? Brother, what's that?"

"Uhhhh, well... It's nothing." He reflexively hid it behind his back.

"...Don't bother Ichika too much, Isam."

"Ahhh, yeah, I know I was messing up."

"I wonder about that... Haaah. Anyway, I've got to go to work."

"Work? If you mean adventurer work, I can—"

"It's a part-time job. I'll be serving in the cafeteria. You really bothered them and it'd be embarrassing if we didn't make it up to them somehow!"

"Y-You think so? Well, guess I'll leave it to you then."

"Uh-huh, bye bye. Don't do anything crazy while I'm gone, okay? You have to leave the town chief alone!" said Mimiko as she left their inn room.

Isam, left on his own, took another look at the aphrodisiac potion he had been hiding.

"I wonder if Sori— I wonder if Ichika really will fall head over

heels for me if she drinks this.” Even if it were the real thing, would Ichika ever fall for Isam? He rolled it around in his hand while thinking about what to do.

“Dude, Isam, that drink looks super delish. Yoink!” The potion suddenly disappeared. Ichika, who had popped up behind him out of nowhere, had it in her hands.

“Wait, th-that’s!”

“Hmmm? Gulp, gulp... Fwaaah!” Ichika gulped down the aphrodisiac potion before Isam could stop her. “Nmm, my body feels so hot...”

“Are you okay?! Here, have some water.”

“Aaah! Thank you soooo much, Isam! Nmm, you’re always so nice to me, I think I’m falling in love... no, I’ve already completely fallen for you, Isam. Let’s run away together!”

“But Ichika! I mean, Sorin!”

There appeared Keima. He looked at Ichika embracing Isam and blinked in surprise.

“I had no idea Ichika loved you this much, Isam. I think I’ll accept that duel of yours. Or actually, I’ll go ahead and free Sorin. Consider her debt absolved.”

Okay, that was pushing it. (Everything above was complete and utter fantasy.)

No way would anyone ever just drop a two thousand gold coin debt. And with that collar on her neck, they couldn’t just run away together. That didn’t mean the idea of Ichika being head over heels for him wasn’t appealing, but... Wait, wait. He could make getting rid of the debt one of the conditions for the duel. In the first place, there was no way Keima could possibly think that Ichika would ever be able to pay him two thousand gold coins. The number was probably only that high to crush any of her hope.

...In which case, feelings were important after all. She couldn’t say what she really felt as long as she had that collar on her. Using the aphrodisiac to open her up might be for the best. That said, the aphrodisiac was clearly suspicious. He would want to test it out on someone else first. The potion was expensive enough that it would really hurt his wallet, but he couldn’t make Ichika drink poison by accident. But then again, if it was poison, should he really make some stranger drink it? He would have to test it on himself or a family member to avoid causing trouble... which meant Mimiko?

No, that would bring its own set of problems. One problem all beastkin faced was the awkwardness of a family member going into heat. It was Isam’s duty as her brother to make sure any potential mate was fit for her affections. It would be no laughing matter if the aphrodisiac made her fall in love with some passing rando.

In which case, he only had one choice. Drink it himself. He opened the potion and sniffed. It had a sweet scent. He stuck a finger in and let a tiny bit soak into his fur before bringing it up to his mouth. A sweet fruity flavor spread through it. It didn't seem to be poison, at the very least. Though, he didn't know if it was working. Maybe that small amount wasn't enough.

Isam gulped down half the potion. After a bit of waiting, his eyes heated up and his blood flow sped up. A tingling spark traveled through his brain, and his throat dried up. His sense of smell sharpened, allowing him to distinguish smells even easier than before.

"Ngh! Looks like this stuff does work..." He looked at the half-empty potion and thought of Ichika. Given the effects of the aphrodisiac, well, there was no surprise his heart ached incredibly hard for her.

Haaaah, haaaah... Wheeew. He managed to calm down somehow.

"This stuff lasts for a surprisingly long time... Whew, that was close." He definitely would have gone into heat if he had drank the whole potion in one go. It was the real thing, just as one would expect from a Chaos-made aphrodisiac. Though as mentioned, not much would come from Ichika falling in love with him since she was a slave. The potion was a waste of money. He would have to go hunt more Iron Golems to make up for it.

"...Yeah, guess that's what I should do. I'm off to hunt golems." He had the time, and hunting golems would be a good way to cool off his excited body. Isam left his inn room to get to work and immediately ran into Ichika in the hall.

"Oh? Isam, didjya join Beddhism or something? Can't believe you're sleeping this late in the day."

"Guh?! I mean, uh, well..." For some reason, he was so nervous he could barely speak. What could possibly be happening? Just kidding. It was obviously because of the aphrodisiac. He was falling in love with Ichika all over again and that made him nervous.

Her nice scent drifted into his nose. His back straightened as if he had been hit head on by magic. Naturally, he hadn't, but Ichika looked like she was shining.

"Hm? What's with you, Isam? Handshake."

"Woof!" Isam reflexively put his hand on Ichika's when she said "handshake." That would have been fine on its own, but he used the hand he was carrying the potion with.

"A gift for me? D'awww."

"Ngh?! No, that's not...!"

Ichika snatched the bottle from him. Isam watched with his blood draining from his face.

"A potion? What a pretty pink. Dunno if I've ever seen one like

this before.”

“...W-Wanna have some? I found it in the dungeon, and uh, it sure smelled nice. I just tried some and it was pretty good.”

“Dunno man, this potion’s new to me. Didjya really find it in the dungeon?”

“...Aaah, maybe I bought it from a merchant? Hard to remember.”

Isam looked away with his voice trailing off.

“Bro, don’t poison me.”

“I would never!”

“I mean, you’ve kinda been trying to kidnap me and stuff, so... You never know,” said Ichika while popping the cap off the potion. “Whoa, this does have a killer smell. Sniff sniff.”

“.....” Isam remembered that he had just put his lips on that potion. Would Ichika be able to sniff out his saliva? The thought of that made him blush. If not for his fluffy fur, Ichika would have seen his cheeks go bright red.

“Kay, bottoms up!”

“Wha?!”

Ichika lifted up the potion and gulped some down.

“Wowzers. Tastes kinda like peaches. Don’t think it’s alcoholic, though... Is it some kinda juice?”

“Y-Yeah, maybe. It doesn’t seem harmful.”

Ichika went and gulped down the rest. Isam felt his heart racing. At this rate, Ichika would fall head over heels fo—

“Ichika, I got the ingredients from the pantry!”

“Oh, right, Mimiko. Be right there, bae!” Ichika spun around and saw her. Saw Mimiko. She. Saw. Mimiko.

“...Mimikooo, would you c’mere for a second.”

“Sure? What’s up?”

“Hyah! Take this and this and this!”

“Ahyaaaah?! I-Ichika?!” Ichika embraced Mimiko in front of Isam and rubbed her fur all over.

“Oooh, so fluffy fluffy fluffy! Mwaaah, and you smell soooo good. You’re using that shampoo, right? The stuff I gave you?”

“Y-Yes, since you gave it to me and everything...”

“You’re using the shampoo I gave you... Gueheheheh, that’s good, that’s just, so good!” Ichika touched Mimiko’s body all over while cackling like a creep.

“Awawawa! Wait, I-Isam?! Why are you just standing there?! Stop heeeer!”

“Ah, r-right, Sorin! Stop! Don’t touch her, touch me!” Isam yelled.

“I FRIGGIN’ TOLD YOU TO CALL ME ICHIKA YOU
FUCKWAAAD!”

“GUH?!” Ichika slammed her fist down on Isam’s head like a

hammer of steel, so hard he collapsed onto the ground. Then she did it once more for good measure.

“Tch, your fur’s not nearly as fluffy as Mimiko’s. You keep being an idiot and I’m gonna take Mimiko from you. Right, Mimiko? Eheheh, fluffy fluffy.”

“I-Ichika... Aww...” Ichika’s groping was a little less perverted than before, so Mimiko just kind of gave up.

“Guuh... I-Ichika... I love... you... guh.” Isam’s vision went dark.

Mimiko’s Perspective

Ichika had been clinging to Mimiko ever since they met Isam in the hall earlier.

“U-Um. Ichika. Should we really have left Isam in the hall like that?”

“Meeeh. Who cares. To be real, he totally deserved that.” That last line confused Mimiko.

“Um, did he do something dumb again?”

“Yeaah, well, pretty much. Things might’ve gotten bad if I didn’t stumble on him,” replied Ichika while clinging to Mimiko from behind. Her breath was tickling the back of her ear.

“I’m sorry, for whatever he was trying to do.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. You did nooooothing wrong. It’s all his fault for carrying around an aphrodisiac potion.”

“An aphrodisiac potion...?” Mimiko tilted her head.

“Nmm, you can think of it as like, a drug that makes someone go into heat for a bit.”

“Into heat...?! Um, I-Ichika, s-stoop...” Now that she mentioned it, Mimiko could smell something strange on Ichika’s breath.

“It’s a pink potion with a peachy smell. One time I was forced to drink some of that and fight a horde of goblins in a coliseum while people watched. Oh, but that was before Master bought me, ’kay?”

Fighting goblins after drinking a drug that makes you go into heat... The mere thought made the blood drain from Mimiko’s face. That was a horrible idea, one that made a mockery of female adventurers everywhere. Hearing that Ichika was put through that made Mimiko feel cold anger from the bottom of her heart.

“U-Um, were you okay?”

“Yup, I killed ’em all and sliced them to bits. I tried boiling and eating their chunks, but whew lad, they tasted like garbo!” cackled Ichika, which made Mimiko’s anger fade away. Ichika was, as always, all about food. In her own words, why have sex when you could eat a good meal instead?

“But man, if Master hadn’t bought me there, I woulda been sent

right back to the everlasting dark of the underground coliseum! I beat back a pack of Orcs like that, which meant Minotaurs were up next. That woulda been rough all drugged up, not gonna lie. I owe Master a lot." Ichika was strong. Not just physically with weapons and muscles and all that, but mentally as well. Mimiko knew that very well.

"By the way, never forget that it's better to take this kinda drug head-on than get surprised when someone mixes it in your food or drink. We women gotta protect ourselves on our own."

Mimiko knew Ichika was strong, but she didn't know she was this strong. Maybe she had gotten even stronger while separated from Mimiko and her brother.

"R-Right. I'll do my best."

"And well, once you're all drugged up, maybe go after the boy you like and go to town? Woof, I forgot just how much work these puppies do... Your body absorbs a potion the second you drink it, so you can't even throw it back up. At least the peach flavor's hella tasty. This stuff would be the bomb if you mixed it with some nice beer. For real." Ichika spoke while continuing to grope Mimiko all over. The aphrodisiac was really doing work on her.

"Umm, but why drink it in the first place? Couldn't you have just pretended to...?"

"What, you're telling me to waste food?"

"You consider that food...?"

"Dangerous food, but yeah. And like, the thing is, who knows what would've happened if I just threw it out, y'know?" Ichika was probably thinking about her friends. Or rather, those she wouldn't want groping those who she wouldn't mind being groped by, and those she actively wanted to be groped by.

"Yeah, not a chance. Guess I coulda donated it to the Beddhist church, though."

"Y-Yeah! Religious people probably have a lot of self control." Mimiko thought for sure they would safely dispose of the aphrodisiac. Ichika averted her eyes for some reason, while continuing to rub Mimiko's ears.

"Ichika, maybe you shouldn't go back to the cafeteria? Will you be able to work like that?"

"Aaah... There are a lot of customers out there, huh. Guess I'll go cool down in a bath first. Tell Kinue what's up for me, 'kay?"

"S-Sure! Sorry Ichika, my brother's always such a bonehead..." Mimiko apologized, and Ichika patted her head. That reminded her of the past. It felt nostalgic.

"Hahaha, don't sweat it. By the way, real talk, aphrodisiac potions cost like eight silvers. Not a bad deal to drink one for free!" Eight silvers. Mimiko's expression froze at that figure. For reference, she

would need to work in the cafeteria hard all day to earn one silver. And that was fairly high pay all things considered. Most jobs would pay less.

“...I’ll deal with him later.”

“Ahaha! Have fun!”

After seeing the laughing Ichika off, Mimiko decided to give Isam an angry lecture later. Depending on the circumstances she might even make him grovel before her to earn her forgiveness.

Mimiko swished her tail, having found a target to dump her anger on.

Keima’s Perspective

Alright, that Isam guy’s been a real pain in the dick for a while now. He hunts large boars in the nearby forest and proposes to Ichika with them, then gets rejected. He locks himself in the dungeon to find as many curry rolls as possible after hearing Ichika likes them, finds a single one after three days, proposes to her with it, gets rejected. He gathers edible flowers, makes a bouquet out of them, offers it to Ichika while proposing, gets rejected.

I appreciated that he was really passionate about this, but come on. Give up already. And why would he ever propose to Ichika while she was at work? She yelled, “Don’t bother me when I’m working! I’m about to get real ticked off!” before kicking him and grinding her foot against his skull. *Seems like you’re already ticked off, Ichika. And didn’t you say something about that being extremely humiliating to beastkin? Oh, he’s lower than you in status, so it’s okay. Makes sense.*

As an aside, regarding things not quite so peaceful, there was some suspicious guy lurking around the dungeon. He was passing himself off as a traveling merchant and... well, he probably was a traveling merchant, but his DP income per day called that into question. Despite looking like a normal merchant, he was somehow earning us 300/DP a day.

Incidentally, for comparison, an average C-Rank adventurer earned 100/DP. The top adventurer in our town, Gozou, was 120/DP. Niku was 500/DP... *Wait, Niku, isn’t that even more DP than last time? Are you hitting puberty or something? That’s almost as much as Suzuki the Hero used to earn us.* Is Niku on the level of an inhuman Hero? Gah, this is all Leona’s fault. Grumble grumble God of Chaos grumble grumble.

Anyway, that traveling merchant was earning us 300/DP. That was some nice income, but I didn’t like him lurking around town. I went ahead and tagged him. Hopefully he just got buff as hell so he could travel and do business without needing bodyguards. *But if he’s a*

spy, where's he from...? Ehhh... No idea.

"Keima, do you have a second?" Rokuko spoke to me while I was watching the merchant through the monitor.

"Hm? 'Sup, Rokuko."

"Um, well. You've probably noticed him by now, but that merchant gives me the creeps."

"You too?" That said, we couldn't get rid of him just because he gave off bad vibes. If only he would try lighting the inn on fire or something.

"Well, I'll keep an eye on him. Maybe I'll have Neruneh or someone help out."

"Yeah. Feel free to summon an employee if you want."

"I'll think about it. I wonder what monster would be best for spying on someone?"

"One that doesn't need sleep and has human-level intelligence, for sure." *Now that I think about it, Dungeon Cores don't need to eat or sleep, either. They're perfect for this kind of job. Makes sense.* "You could get two or three and have them take turns, too."

"That's true. Maybe I'll buy another set of Silkies." Despite both of us thinking that wouldn't be too bad, we decided not to summon anyone new for this.

"Alright, time to have a nap." I got on my side to sleep, and that's when it happened.

"~~~! ~~~! ~~~! ~~~!"

I could hear someone's voice. Given that I was in my thoroughly soundproofed town chief room, there was either someone right outside my room or there was someone being extremely loud. Maybe both? Either way, I wasn't gonna let anyone get in the way of my sleep. I headed in the direction of the voice.

Isam's Perspective

"Haaaaaaah..." In the end, despite attempting numerous plots, none of them ended up going well. Not even his proposals to Ichika were working out.

She said not to bother her during work, but it was the same song and dance even when she wasn't working. "Can't you see my life's on the line here? Don't bother me when I'm playing slots!" "Don't show me your nasty face when I'm eating, get outta here!" and so on. Work, gamble, eat. Remove those three and there basically wasn't any time to talk to Ichika at all. She would eat and go to the onsen with Mimiko since they were both girls, but...

"Wait. Gender's got nothing to do with food. Why is she turning me down there...?" In any case, he was earning funds to stay in Goren

by hunting Iron Golems. It was nice that he only had to hunt one every few days to stay afloat.

Isam was running out of techniques that the traveling merchant had taught him. Putting roaches in the food was just the start. He tried stealing a book from the library but fell into an anti-theft pitfall by the entrance (then escaped questioning by saying he just accidentally forgot it in his bag). He thought about lighting the inn on fire, but that was too much even for him. He tried putting a goblin corpse by the inn's entrance, but there were too many people passing by who would see. In the end he put it by the entrance to the town chief's residence, but within seconds a green maid had cleaned it up. He failed at everything he attempted to do.

Incidentally, he got the goblin back through Mimiko so it could be disposed of as fertilizer for the farmers. Mimiko naturally got extremely mad at him. *Curse you, town chief.*

So, he was in the middle of trying out whatever was left — the ones that seemed like they would be entirely ineffectual. Isam was backed so far into a corner he had no choice but to rely on them.

"Listeen! Listen to my soooooong!" He was performing like a minstrel (the shouting kind) at the plaza near the town chief's room. He basically was just shouting as loud as he could while strumming the instrument he had found in the dungeon, known as a "guitar." The lyrics were a love song he thought up for Ichika.

"Hyahaha! Aaaaah!"

"Look at this tone deaf loser!"

"Get outta here!"

"Gimme my money back! Not that I paid!"

He actually built a small crowd of onlookers since the town didn't see many real minstrels. Though none of them were donating any money.

The traveling merchant had actually told him to do it at night, but Goren was a town filled with dedicated Beddhists who loved their sleep — when he tried to get going at night, a citizen stopped him and with a deadly serious look said, "Don't make noise at night. You'll die." He was serious, too. Hence Isam doing it during the day, despite thinking it wouldn't really do anything.

"Awooooooooooooo!"

"There it is! A wolf beastkin howling!"

"Wowee, that's something else!"

"Alriiight, that wasn't too bad. Have a silver."

His howling received high praise. Isam was starting to have fun singing, to the point he forgot all about the fact he was trying to bother the town chief.

More donations came his way as the crowd thickened. When he

yelled “Heyoooo!” they shouted “Heyoooo!” back at him. He was getting into it. On the plaza there was freedom. Just music and cheers. Raw excitement sparking through the air.

But then, out of nowhere, it all stopped.

“...Huh?” Isam, following the eyes of the crowd, turned around and saw Keima. He was staring at him with sleepy eyes like he had found his arch-nemesis.

“Shut it, doggy. How am I supposed to nap like this?”

“Hmph, this is a public plaza! We can make as much noise as we want here, it’s not a problem.” Isam tried arguing, but Keima laughed him down.

“This is my town. If I say there’s a problem, there’s a problem.” That was tyranny, but also the truth. If the town chief decided something was a problem in his city, it would be. That held true even for those just passing by.

“...But, meh, I’m not that small-hearted. I’ll let you make a little noise. It is daytime, after all. You’d be executed under Beddhism for heresy if it were nighttime, but well... It is daytime, so...” Keima spoke in a low, displeased voice that made it clear he was fighting to keep his frustration under control.

“But if you’re gonna howl, get the heck outta here! Don’t be so friggin’ loud in my backyard!”

“I wanna howl here! I gotta show Ichika how much I love her!” declared Isam, which made Keima click his tongue.

“Alright, alright. That duel you were talking about? Let’s do it. You versus me, one-on-one.”

“Really?!” He hadn’t expected it at all, but Isam’s backtalk had finally gotten Keima to accept his duel.

“How about we gamble on whether you get to keep pining after Ichika? If you win, I won’t stop you from trying to romance Ichika, and if she ever caves in I’ll give you my blessing. You can even get married in this town if you want... But if you lose, never interrupt my sleep again. Alright?”

Married with Ichika. The mere idea sent Isam thinking about the future.

“Isam. Thanks soooo much for saving lil’ ol me...” said Ichika while pushing her chest against Isam’s dense fur.

“Don’t sweat it. I love you, ’course I’m gonna save you.”

“But, I’m not pure anymore... I can’t be your perfect wife.”

“Don’t say that! You’re still beautiful and pure to me, no matter what anyone says!” declared Isam as he embraced Ichika, gently so as to not crush her but powerfully so that they were stuck together.

“Isam... I... Nnn, you dummyyyy...” Ichika’s cheeks blushed red. Isam whispered into her ears.

“...H-Hey. Mind if I call you Sorin when we’re alone? I like that name more.”

“...I thought I hated that name. But when you say it, Isam, it sounds so right. You can call me that... but no one else can,” said Ichika while happily pressing her lips against his cheek.

That’s how it will go down. Definitely! (Delusional.)

“Alright! Let’s duel with Ichika on the line!”

“However! The duel will be both of us going into the dungeon and looking for something that Ichika would like. Whoever finds what makes Ichika the most happy wins. How about it? Ichika will decide who wins and who loses.”

“...What if you use her slave collar to force her to pick you?”

“I wouldn’t pull a dirty trick like that. With everyone here as my witness, I swear I won’t force Ichika to make one decision over another.”

“Alright! It’s a duel!” And so began the war waged over a lone girl. As an aside, nobody noticed that Keima had promised only to let Isam keep trying to romance Ichika like he was already doing — not to free Ichika from slavery.

Keima’s Perspective

Yeah, I decided to take him up on his duel. Though naturally, the items dropped in the dungeon are under my complete control. Which naturally means Isam has no chance whatsoever of winning. Which, naturally, means I don’t have even the slightest intention of letting him have Ichika.

But anyway, I went ahead and told Ichika about the duel and her role in it.

“And that’s what happened.”

“Yeah, dude, you’ve got this in the bag.”

“Right? But, uh, yeah, I made you the reward of the duel without asking first. You fine with that?”

“Totally, totally. And I mean, I’m kinda a slave over here, remember? You do you, Master, that’s how this works.”

Oh yeah, that’s true.

Ichika, looking up at me, brought her face close to mine. “But my heart’s all yours, Master, so don’t let anyone else take me, ’kay?” she said with a grin.

I know she’s joking, but being told that face to face is kinda embarrassing.

“And y’know, you sure are letting him off easy. If he loses, all he’s gotta do is stop interrupting your naps?”

“I mean, there’s literally no way for me to lose here. I’d feel bad if

I screwed him over too hard.”

“Aaah.” Ichika nodded.

“Hey, if you want me to lose so you can start dating Isam, just say the word. I won’t free you from slavery, though.”

“I just told you my heart’s all yours, dude. Kinda a dick move to just dunk all over that. But whatever. How about I donate my freshly worn socks to whoever wins?”

“Alright, no takebacks. I’m gonna win. I’m gonna win this so hard.”

“Hahaha! I’ll keep Rokuko updated. Later, I’ve got stuff to do now.”

“Huh?” I blinked in confusion.

“I’m gonna go bet on the winner!”

“Hold up, you’re the judge. You betting would be obvious fraud. At least stick to being a bookmaker.”

“Kay, I’m gonna take that as you officially sanctioning me being a bookmaker!”

“Sure. Let’s hope people actually bother to bet against me.”

“Aaah... Th-There’s gotta be a few who’ll go after the dark horse, right? And I can say the proceeds go to the Beddhist church... Oh, can I use half of it on my food?”

“Uh, sure, do whatever you want.” I went ahead and gave her my permission, because why not?

By the way, Isam bet a gold coin on himself and made all that a nonissue. And even though I was the number one adventurer for the [Cave of Greed], dungeon drops introduced a luck factor that led to more than a few people betting on Isam.

But in the end, the match is all gonna be on Ichika. Everything will be decided once we bring back our drops, one or more. Which means this is really a bet on which of us Ichika will pick. I would think a good chunk of the people betting understand that.

...Wait, doesn’t that mean Isam actually has a chance to win?

And so it arrived. The day of my duel with Isam.

“Heya, Isam. Did you get a good night’s rest? We’re all Beddhists here, so I don’t want to hear any excuses like you were too excited to get any sleep last night.”

“Hmph, I’m on top of the world right now. This duel is mine. And... I-I’m gonna make Ichika my wife!”

Ichika wasn’t the reward of the duel, but it seemed that Isam had already mentally concluded that “winning = Ichika wife.” *Though to be fair, Isam winning would mean Ichika screwing with the results to make sure he won, so yeah. Maybe that wasn’t too wrong.*

“A duel of lovers with a beautiful girl on the line! Who will the

goddess of victory smile upon?! Hurry and place your bet before time's up! One betting slip is ten coppers! Oh, and those voting for town chief, no more than five per person! Thank you, thank you!"

Calling yourself a beauty, Ichika? For shame. Not to mention that the only goddess of victory (i.e. judge) here is you. Though to be fair, Ichika was dressed up for the occasion so she really did look like a real beauty. She was wearing a dark blue dress purchased for this duel and had on a light covering of makeup, making her look as stunning as a young noblewoman.

"Ichika, might I have five slips? For Keima, of course."

"Heya, Mai! You got it!" And indeed, when talking to a real noblewoman like Mai, Ichika looked like her older sister. Though she was casually selling gambling tickets while acting like her usual relaxed self.

Anyway, Isam came walking up to me before the battle while laughing.

"Hahaha! Seems like people only get to buy five tickets each for you, huh? Your crimes are finally catching up to you, villain!"

"Are you an idiot? Without that limit there'd be too many people betting on me for the event to function."

"Huh...? W-Wait, really?!" Isam shouted loud enough for Ichika to hear, but she ignored him since she was busy selling tickets.

Get back to your spot already, man. You're gonna get disqualified.

"Gonna start in thirty minutes, dudes! Ticket booth closes in twenty minutes! Oh, anyone who wants to bet on Isam, go talk to the High Priestess!"

"Thank yooou! We appreciate the donations, teehee!"

Uh, Ichika, she's literally calling them donations. Are people just buying a smile from her for ten coppers?

And so, the duel began with a lot more fanfare than I thought it would. Oh, and to be clear, there were no rules except the time limit.

"GOT YOU!"

I had predicted that he would come at me swinging the moment he could.

"Nope. Get 'im, Kuro! And Ichika!" Niku and Ichika stood between me and Isam. It was for this exact reason that I had waited a decent distance away from the starting point.

"Wha?! You coward, don't hide behind girls and kids! You're even using Sor— uh, Ichika against me!"

"You fool! I wouldn't have done this if you had just played nice and focused on exploring the dungeon, but now I'm gonna use my slaves since there's no rule against it!" Spelling out my rationale in a long-winded explanation was important for those watching to know that I was completely in the right. By the way, I had promised not to

make Ichika let me win the competition, but I hadn't said anything about making her fight for me.

"Awww, Isaaam? Are you gonna hit wittle ol' me? Good, 'cause I'm gonna beat the crap outta you! Come get some!" Ichika taunted Isam in her dress, which made him look away.

"C-Come on, So— I mean, I would never hit you! And what's with that outfit?! It looks way too good on you!"

"Oh? Thanks, man. Do you think I look good too, Master?"

"Yeah, sure. Super good."

"Kyaaaah! Master's flirting with meee! I must be a real beauty after all!"

I mean, you would be if you cooled it with the dudebro talk a little more.

Anyway, now that Isam had stopped his ambush, I called out to him.

"How about this. I'll call these two off if you play fair and focus on the dungeon."

"Ngh... Fine! I'll beat you fair and square!"

"So you were planning to beat me by playing dirty, huh? Not a good look, my man."

"Shut it! I wasn't gonna break any rules!" Isam stormed off to the dungeon.

Sheesh. At this rate I won't even need to cheat to win. And uh, if we're talking about playing dirty within the rules, I can do a lot more than you can, Isam. And I'm going to.

Just to be safe, I let Isam have a head start so we wouldn't run into each other. Only after seeing on the map that he actually was playing fair and going through the dungeon did I follow in after him.

And then, not long after entering the dungeon, I found a treasure chest. Naturally, it was one I had placed myself ahead of time for myself. Inside was a high-quality curry roll. I asked Ichika what she'd want the day before so I knew it would be my golden ticket.

That didn't break any rules, of course. There wasn't a single rule about not placing treasure chests in the dungeon yourself. And thinking about it like a normal person, asking someone what they would want for a present was totally normal — not cheating. *Anyway, time to kill some time and head back whenever.*

* * *

The duel was over. I handed a curry roll over to Ichika, which she loved, and an expensive one at that. Isam on the other hand gave her a mere potion. I had fiddled with the treasure chests so he would find anything *except* rare drops and curry rolls, so a potion actually was the best thing he could possibly find.

“And the winner is... Okay, let’s be real, I don’t even gotta say it.” For some reason, Ichika’s statement made Isam give a smug grin.

“Heh, yep. Potions are worth more straight cash. That means I win!” Apparently that was why he was being smug. However.

“Master totally wins!”

...As if there was any doubt, I won. Those who had bet on Isam as a way to donate to the church all shrugged as if they had expected it. The few out there who had actually expected him to win, well, I could hear them letting out some yells of disappointment. But they had only themselves to blame. The odds had never been in their favor and they knew it.

“What?! But why?!”

“...I mean, Curry Rolls taste way better than potions, dude.” Ichika laid it out straight.

“B-But potions could save your life in a pinch! Why would you want some weird bread more than a potion?!”

“Huh? You picking a fight, dude? Alright, alright. Looks like you’re gonna be needing that potion to save your own life, punk! EAT FIST!”

“GUH!” Isam got a hard punch in the face for running his mouth.

Try not to rip your dress, Ichika. Not that I couldn’t fix it. With {Create Golem}, that is.

“Isam. Just to clear things up here, this was a duel over who could get Ichika the better present. Whatever makes her happier is the better choice, and the price of the present doesn’t matter. Especially if you’re just gonna go and piss her off.”

“Ngh...!” Isam faltered.

“So basically, to sum things up, you don’t understand Ichika at all.”

“...Gah! Alright, alright, you beat me.” Isam accepted his defeat more gracefully than I expected.

Isam’s Perspective

“Haaah...” Isam sat in the bar drinking, and before long someone approached him from behind.

“Hey. Too bad about the duel, huh?” Isam noticed the man only after he spoke to him. He turned around and saw that it was the traveling merchant who had kindly given him all that advice.

“Huh? Oh, hey. Yeah... I lost. But I still haven’t fought him head on, and on second thought he never told me to give up on Ichika. I’ll win next time!”

“Haha, I see, I see... The truth is, I actually got my hands on something real special.”

“Yeah? What’s that?”

“Well, well. Have a listen while you drink. Here, this one’s on me.”

“Oh? Thanks, man. Though merchants giving away free stuff kinda spooks me out.”

“Hahaha! I actually bet on the town chief, you see.”

“There it is. Alright then, give it here.” Isam took the mug of beer and gulped it down. “Fwaah! But still, what am I supposed to do about a two thousand gold debt?”

“Hm? What are you talking about?”

“Ah, I’m just thinking about the girl I like. She owes the town chief of this place two thousand golds, which means she’s probably stuck here forever. Sad, huh? But what’s really sad is the fact I can’t save her... Gods, I’m pathetic. I’m so pathetic I hate it!” Isam bemoaned his woes to the merchant while emptying the mug. But the merchant’s plastered on smile didn’t fade even in the face of a drunk, overbearing beastkin.

“I see, I see. I think you’ll like what I have for you, then.”

“Yeah?”

“That town chief has all his authority because there’s a dungeon here. If not for the dungeon, there would be no town and his inn would be empty. It’s all the dungeon’s fault.”

“...Huh. It’s all the dungeon...”

“Which brings me to this. Take a look,” said the traveling merchant before taking out a bottle. Inside were two black worm-like bugs about the size of a pointer finger, wriggling around.

They were so black it felt as if they were concentrations of pure darkness. Their front tips rounded out into mouths. The inside of their mouths were red like blood and dotted with a circle of sharp white teeth resembling an inward saw blade.

Isam shuddered. Just looking at them was enough to know they were unnatural, malicious creatures.

“Wh-What are those?”

“They’re bugs made in a certain laboratory to erase dungeons.”

“Erase... dungeons?” Isam repeated what he said, not understanding the words in full. The merchant’s lips curved into a sharper grin.

“I’m repeating myself here, but this town only exists because of the dungeon. Just think of how much trouble the town chief would be in if the dungeon were to disappear, even only momentarily.”

“...Yeah, he’d be in a lot of trouble.” What exactly did the merchant mean when he said the bugs “erased” dungeons? Isam had no idea whatsoever. But, he knew for a fact the bugs were no normal bugs.

“It’s simple to use these. Just put them on the ground within the dungeon. You could just leave them lying around, but they’ll bite faster if you hold them by the tail and lower their mouth to the floor.” Isam listened to the merchant in a daze, as if he were dreaming. But even in his blurry thoughts he knew that “erasing a dungeon” was something way over his head.

“Listen. If the dungeon goes away, Sorin will be free.”

“If the dungeon goes away... Sorin will be... free? Really?”

“Really, really. Try thinking about Sorin’s smile right now. Feels motivating, doesn’t it?” At the merchant’s suggestion, Isam imagined Ichika’s smile. It certainly did motivate him. “And well, these bugs may be very important, but they’re prototypes. I’ll sell them for cheap. How much do you have in your wallet? Five silvers? Sure, that’s more than enough.” The merchant placed the bottle on the table and Isam paid four silvers for it.

“Thanks again. Consider the bugs yours. It’s pretty late, but you should go into the dungeon under the cover of night. The bugs are dark too, so it’ll all come together. Try and release them deep inside the dungeon. Okay?” The merchant clapped his hands and the fog on Isam’s head dispersed on the spot. He knew clearly what he needed to do.

“Yeah, you got it. Thanks for the good deal.”

“Sure. Anyway, I’m leaving this town now. See you.”

“Yeah. Thanks for all the help.”

“Hey, same to you.” The traveling merchant left with a thin smile.

That night, Isam went deep into the dungeon’s labyrinth area... and let the bugs go.

Chapter 3

I made Isam swear to no longer interrupt my sleep. Heh, you might think that was me going easy on him, but I could claim anything was interrupting my sleep. Even when it came to Ichika, all I had to say was, “Hey, go any further and you’ll be getting in the way of my sleep.” He’d have no choice but to stop.

Finally, I can sleep in peace, I thought right as Rokuko came to my room. Weird, I was pretty sure she was supposed to be participating in some party that was being thrown over my duel with Isam ending.

“Keima, it looks like that weird merchant left while I was focused on the party.”

“Huh?” *That weird merchant being... Oh, the suspicious one with 300/DP.* “What was with him, anyway?”

“Who knows? I never figured him out. He was buying and selling a bunch of things, but that’s normal for a merchant, so...”

“Was he selling anything weird? Or was he maybe only buying things unique to our dungeon?”

“I didn’t see everything he sold, but most traveling merchants only buy stuff unique to our dungeon. There’s nothing else here except the cushions and doll things the Succubi make.”

Oh yeah, that’s true.

“What did you see him sell?”

“Hmmm, well, he was selling a lot of things to a lot of people. I think he mainly dealt in potions, though.”

Why would someone buy potions here? We’re the ones making them in the dungeon, I thought, but then remembered someone might want a potion to bring with them into the dungeon. After all, if nobody wanted to buy the potions, he wouldn’t have been able to sell them.

“But anyway, I guess we don’t have to worry about him now that he’s gone.”

“Ehhh, there’s a chance he left something behind. Keep your eyes open for now. If anything happens tell me right away.”

“Okaaay.”

In retrospect, I should have been more cautious there. If only I was more on guard.

It happened in the morning.

“Master! Master, shit’s getting real! Wake up!”

I woke up to someone pounding on my door. Everyone knew not to wake me up over minor issues, so Ichika coming to wake me up anyway meant things really were bad. *And well, if they aren't, I'm not the one who's gonna be sorry about this.*

"What's up?" I got out of bed and spoke to the door. Ichika replied with a panicked tone.

"Rokuko's knocked out!"

Uh... What?

"Hold on, can you repeat that?"

"Dude, I'm telling you Rokuko's knocked out! She didn't get out of her room today! I thought that was weird and found her stuck in bed with a nasty fever!"

I shook my tired head awake and left my room.

"Guuuh, guuuh, I hate forcing myself awake..."

"What're we gonna do?! How can Dungeon Cores even get sick?!"

"I dunno. I'm gonna go check her out." I headed to Rokuko's room with the thoroughly hysterical Ichika in tow.

"Rokuko! You okay?!"

"Nnn...?" I entered Rokuko's room and saw her lying in bed in her pajamas. Her cover was off, maybe because she got too hot under it. Her cheeks were red and her eyes were wavering, unfocused.

"...So cold..."

"That's 'cause you took the cover off. Keep it on next time." I picked up the cover and laid it on Rokuko. *This sure does look like a cold.*

"Rokuko, can Dungeon Cores catch colds?"

"...What's a cooold?"

Oh, huh. I guess she doesn't even know what colds are...?

"Colds make your head hurt, your thoughts get fuzzy, and your nose gets runny. There's a lot of symptoms that all get called colds, though the main one is actually getting a fever."

"Aaah... Guess I have a cold, then..." She seemed like she was in a daze, and she definitely did have a fever.

Hmm. Yeah, I should talk to Haku about this.

"Ichika, I'm gonna go talk to Haku. Take care of Rokuko in the meantime for me."

"Got it! I should just treat this like a normal cold, I guess?"

"Yeah. Oh, but swap out her bed for the Divine Futon. That'll be better for her."

"Roger!" Rokuko's Divine Futon was around her room somewhere. I could count on it for its healing powers.

I turned around to leave Rokuko to Ichika and go see Haku, when suddenly my jersey caught on something. I glanced back and saw that rather than being caught on something, Rokuko had grabbed its

sleeve.

“...Keimaaa, don’t goooo...” Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were wet.



I hate to say it, but my partner's really cute when she's sick. *Is this a charm? The day's finally come where something other than feet is getting my heart going.*

"...Ngh, I have to leave! This is for your sake...!"

"....."

Come on, don't stare at me. You'll make me want to stay with you.

"Well... If you really need to go to help me, I get it... Bye byeee..."

"Yeah. I'll be back. Oh, and before I go, I'll leave a purin for you to eat. Sound good? You'll get better faster with something in your stomach, probably." I had no idea if food would actually help Dungeon Cores since they usually didn't get sick at all, but well. No harm in trying. I took out some purins from {Storage} and left them beside the bed. *Don't eat Rokuko's too, Ichika.*

But then, I noticed something when trying to head to the [Ivory Secret Spot] to contact Haku.

"Oh man..." The dungeon's "place" function wasn't working. I normally just opened the menu and placed myself where I wanted to go, but several of the buttons on the menu were crossed out and locked off.

...I mean, that's better than the buttons just not working when I hit them, but is this really happening because Rokuko's sick? It's gotta be. This would be too much of a coincidence otherwise. But with the dungeon functions locked off, I had no way of contacting Haku. Maybe the Guild's information network would help? No, it was very likely I didn't have the time for that. My best move would be to consult my other more experienced dungeon associate, Ittetsu.

...Buuut, wait. I can't go into our meeting room without placing myself there. Having no other choice, I headed straight to the [Flame Caverns] myself. The peak of the mountain was a bit far away, so I just went through the corridor Rokuko made.

Luckily, the map function still worked. I went into our dungeon while doing my best to avoid other adventurers. I passed through the entrance area, got through the Labyrinth area, skated by the puzzle area, went down the spiral staircase while resting a bit, and... haaah, haaah... finally reached the storage area.

"Man... I made this dungeon myself, but walking through it sure takes a lot out of me." It felt like traveling up a tall apartment building without functional elevators due to a power outage. *Wait, I could have had a golem carry me the rest of the way once I reached the halfway point. I'll do that on the way back.*

I passed through the oppressive magma area and finally passed through the door to the [Flame Caverns].

"Ittetsuuu. I've got something to talk about, could you come over

heere? Ittetsuuu.” I repeated myself for about three minutes until Ittetsu appeared. The sight of a huge Salamander filling up the entire corridor would have sent me running if we weren’t on friendly terms.

“Heya, Keima. Fuck’s goin’ on? Why ya here instead of the usual room?”

“Whew, I’m glad you’re here. Something happened.” I explained to him that Rokuko was bedridden with sickness.

“So that’s why I’m here. Do Dungeon Cores get fevers too?”

“Colds, huh... Never heard of that before. Maybe Cores morphed into human form, but Cores in my faction don’t do that much. And y’know, I don’t even get what you mean by a fever anyway. I get colder when I’m sick, y’know.” *Oh, right. Salamanders are literally made of fire.* But still, it looked like he couldn’t say for sure whether Cores taking on human form would allow them to get sick or not.

“Either way, that’s fuckin’ rare for sure. Did Haku say anythin’?”

“That’s the thing. Seems like I can’t use a lot of dungeon functions right now, which means I can’t contact her.”

“Huh? That’s fuckin’ weird for sure. I’ve never heard of dungeon functions going down. Ah, wait, there was that one thing.”

“Yeah?”

Ittetsu scratched his head.

“Aaah... Thing is, you’re the one who told me about it. That High Priestess or whoever pulled some shit and sealed your functions, yeah? That’s all I got.”

Oh, right. I forgot about that happening.

“So someone’s attacking us...?”

“Could be. You’re gonna be better off askin’ Haku than me, though. Remember that dungeon near Tsia? We were just fuckin’ talkin’ about her being part of your faction. Can’t ya talk to her?”

Oh, right, the Tsia dungeon. I probably should have gone there first since we’re part of the same faction. Though they’re kind of trying to revolt against Haku, so I dunno.

“Damn, I forgot all about them. This sickness must be really throwing me off. Thanks, Ittetsu. I’ll go try them out.”

“Don’t sweat it. We’re tight, yeah? Just come and give me advice if my lil’ Redra gets sick too.” I gave Ittetsu a thumbs up as he waved me off, and while I was at it left some wine bottles for him before returning to my dungeon. It was time to race to the Tsia dungeon.

* * *

I headed for the [Flower Garden of Light], also known as the Tsia dungeon. Niku carried me most of the way, with me transformed into a mouse with {Ultra Transformation} to lighten the load. Niku was the fastest person in our dungeon, so yeah. She was even faster than

horses.

Anyway, since we (i.e. she) passed by Tsia and ran straight to its dungeon all the way from Goren, she naturally got tired out — and really, it was kinda odd that running that far *just* tired her out, but that was the power of youth, maybe. I had Niku rest while I called for Core 219 just like I had called for Ittetsu. Despite the fact I was rushing, she appeared while playing useless music and growing flowers beneath her dancing feet. As always, she was dressed up in a masculine outfit.

“Well well well, if it isn’t Keima Goreeen! What brings you here?”

“Core 219, I’ve got three questions. One, do Dungeon Cores get colds? Two, what do you do if they get colds? Three, is there a way for you to contact Haku immediately?” I immediately asked Core 219 what I wanted to know.

“Hm. You seem to be in quite the hurry, Keima. And luckily for you, I am prepared to provide answers! We are allies after all, you and I!” declared Core 219 with a smile. And a pose. For no reason.

“First answer. Dungeon Cores do get sick sometimes. To morph into a human is to make one’s body act like a human’s. In other words, one can choose to become sick if they so wish.”

“...Wait. So it’s like acting sick?”

Core 219 turned around and dramatically held both her hands high in the air. For no reason.

“Not quite. If a Core wishes to be human, their wish will be granted. That is what it means to morph into human form. And that wish includes getting sick like humans do.” So in short, they’ll catch colds if put in situations where a normal human would catch a cold.

“Okay, what can I do about it?”

Core 219 turned around on one heel and took a pose. For no reason.

“Second answer. Undoing the morph will cure the sickness. But... Core 695 is a human-type to begin with. If she’s not morphing, then she would never get sick in the first place... Ah, I see. She learned to morph for the sake of breeding? Ahaha, you may look cute, but you’re a man where it counts.”

Uh? Hold on, there’s a point for human-type cores to morph into human form...? And uh, breeding? I feel like I just learned a fact that Haku will kill me over. I want to go back in time several seconds before I heard that, but I can’t. I just can’t. God help me.

“Stop, stop. She’s not morphing into a human. Know anything else?”

“What? She is sick despite not morphing into a human? That is strange. Something I’ve never heard of, even.”

“It’s strange? Really?”

Core 219 lifted both hands while giving an over exaggerated reaction.

“Of course. We Dungeon Cores would never get sick without lessening ourselves by morphing into humans. We were made by Father, remember?”

Father. In other words, the God of Darkness. *I guess it would be weird for a Dungeon Core hand-made by a god to get sick... I guess? Ittetsu sure didn't seem that surprised by Rokuko getting sick, but...*

“...What about getting sick and then dungeon functions getting locked off?”

“Now you are truly venturing into the realm of the impossible. For dungeon functions to cease working, one must interfere with the power of the gods themselves. A simple sickness could never do that. It would take even the worst of the worst curses to come close to it.” According to Core 219, Rokuko's situation could not possibly be caused by a simple sickness.

“Well, it's happening.”

“I see. Hence you arriving immediately to report this to *her*. Truly, your situation is unusual.”

I swallowed hard. Rokuko was suffering from symptoms both Ittetsu and Core 219 had never heard of. It was possible something far worse than I had imagined was happening.

“Now, third answer. I will tell you how to contact her. It might not be as ‘immediately’ as you hope, but there are methods.”

“...Are you going to contact her for me or not?”

“Hmm. I wonder.” Core 219 looked at me with a grin.

“...Pretty sure we have a contract making us allies.”

“The contract merely said I won't betray *her* for a hundred years. Oh, but make no mistake, I'm not saying I won't contact her. It's just not something I do lightly, and thus not something I will do for free.” She changed poses again. But I expected her to say all that.

“I did bring some plant fertilizer to give you. Not sure how well it will work here, though, since it's from another world.”

“My my, thank you. I'm sure I can count on something made in the same world as that weed killer stuff.”

Eh... I think the weed killer worked more due to the plants here than the weed killer itself being good, but alright.

Vines sprouted from the ground and formed a chair. Core 219 sat on it and crossed her legs.

“I accept. But it will take three days to reach the capital. It is too far for my {Teleportation} to reach in one go. I will need to use the spell three times even with my mana, which means—”

“Which means spending two separate days resting to recover mana and getting there on the third day.” That definitely wasn't

something she could do lightly. *Maybe I should buy some more fertilizer for her.*

“Oh, and do not get the wrong idea. Even the Ivory Goddess Haku herself needs to rest one day to make the complete trip. I do not have a comparatively small amount of mana or anything of the sort,” said Core 219 with a joking smile.

Still, she could make a trip that usually lasted one month in three days. That would be a big help. Contacting Haku through the guild would both cause a huge fuss and take who knows how long. The wise move here would be to go for the guaranteed three days. It wasn’t instant, but it was better than hesitating and getting help for Rokuko too late.

“I’ve already written a letter explaining the circumstances. I want you to deliver it to her.”

“Certainly. And while you’re here, there is something I would like you to do for me,” said Core 219 while switching her crossed legs.

“Yeah?”

“It’s something that only you can do. Fear not, it won’t take any time at all.”

“I wouldn’t expect too much from me if I were you.”

“It’s nothing too difficult.” Core 219 suddenly leaned forward, bringing her face close to mine. Her cheeks were kind of red.

“Say ‘Please, big brother’ in that beautiful form of yours. As cute as possible, if you will.”

...My head hurts. Have I caught Rokuko’s cold?



Ichika's Perspective

Rokuko was sick. Seeing that hella shocked me. Almost like I saw myself getting sick, you dig? 'Cause for some reason, idiots don't get s — I mean, 'cause Rokuko's a Dungeon Core, and Cores shouldn't get sick. They looked like humans but they weren't. How could they get a human cold?

So basically, I figured shit had gotten real and went to wake Master up immediately. He normally got like unreal mad when someone woke him up, but he thought Rokuko getting sick was just as weird as I did. He left some purins and ran off to gather info.

"Rokuko. You okay, girl?"

"...Ngggh, my head feels fuzzyyy..."

"Guess I'll swap your bed out for that Divine Futon like Master said. Rokuko, you have it on you, right? Sorry to make you do this, but couldja take it out?"

".....Okay." A heavenly futon popped out of Rokuko's {Storage} and fell to the ground with a thump. I picked it up and started swapping out Rokuko's covers with it.

"Nooo, don't..." But Rokuko wouldn't let go of the covers.

"How am I gonna swap'm like this, dude?"

"...You don't have to."

"I sure do. Master ordered me to, and uh, this thing has some healing properties or something, right?"

"Mmm... But I want this cover." Maybe due to being sick, Rokuko was being stubborn and childish in a way she usually wasn't.

"I dunno, you're pretty sweaty. I think you'd feel a lot better with a quick wipe over and the futon." Regardless, Rokuko shook her head repeatedly. *The legends said getting kids outta bed was tough. Never thought they'd be so true.* But still, Rokuko was still Rokuko even when sick in bed. Surely she had some reason for it.

"What's hanging you up on those covers?" I asked, and Rokuko hesitantly opened her mouth.

"Well, it's... it's Keima's, so..." *Aaah. Okay, okay. I get it. Master used to sleep with those covers. Okaaaaay. She wants to sleep under his covers.*

"Alright, I feel ya. I'll just put these covers on top of yours. Should still work even without direct contact, I guess. Something divine's gotta be at least that powerful, yeah?"

"Mm, Keima wants me in the Divine Futon too, so... That's good." Rokuko snuggled deeper beneath her covers as she spoke.

She's still sweaty as heck, but I guess that's fine...?

“...Keima likes it more when we’re usually clean, but sometimes sweaty...”

“True. Guess this is okay, then.” Rokuko sure knew Keima’s fetishes well. And if she didn’t mind being sweaty, sure, alright. I put the Divine Futon (which was basically a big blanket) on top of Rokuko’s blanket.

“Pretty sure it only takes an hour under this to get better?”

“Mhm...” Rokuko nodded beneath her blankets.

“Want your purin?”

“Nmm... Yes, please... I can’t really move much, though... Feed meee...”

“Yeah, yeah. Open wide.”

“Aaaahn.” I scooped up some of the purin with a spoon and guided it into Rokuko’s mouth. Her nomming on it with the spoon in her mouth... was hella cute. But anyway, if she was just sick for no reason, the Divine Futon should fix her right up. Didn’t seem like it was that time of the month for her, after all.

But even when Master got back over an hour later, Rokuko still wasn’t cured. She felt a bit better, but she still had a fever. Maybe the Divine Futon didn’t work on diseases... Though she had recovered enough that she was thinking straight again.

This time, Master left with Niku to go talk to the Dungeon Core of the Tsia dungeon.

“Nggh, my body feels so heavy...”

“Well, girl, nothing you can do but rest. You’ve totes been overworking yourself at the church and managing shifts and stuff. You can just sit back and let Master take care of this one for you.”

“...You’re right,” said Rokuko before falling asleep and breathing peacefully despite being covered in sweat from her fever. Even while away from home, Master kept Rokuko’s heart at ease. Kinda made me jealous, to be real.

Keima’s Perspective

“Okay, perfect, I’ve had my fill. That was a dream come true, Keima. You have talent!”

“I don’t want talent like this... Ngh, where did my pure heart go...” Doing that kind of thing was mentally exhausting. B-But it was all for Rokuko’s sake... Ngh.

“Why so dramatic? You were quite into it a moment ago.”

Wrong! Succubus transformations make you feel pleasure, like, twinges in the crotch every time you satisfy someone’s lust! That’s not my fault! It’s not! I undid my Succubus transformation. *Sheesh, doesn’t she know I’m*

in a hurry? Pervert!

“Well then, I believe it is time for me to depart.”

“Yeah. Might not help much, but want me to toss over some mana potions?”

“No need. They really would not help me at all. Your little favor was much more, ahem, useful. I lowered my resistance and allowed your Succubus request to hit me to the core, and now I am filled with enthusiasm to push my mana to its limit all for the sake of my cute little sister.”

Aaah... That favor was actually for a practical purpose. Sorry for calling you a pervert.

“I will see to it that Haku receives this letter. You may trust me on this, no matter what happens.”

“Thanks. This might end up being nothing, and it might all blow over tomorrow, but if not...”

“...Aha. Love shows itself once again! You fear for the one you love, yes? Then fear not! If it is nothing, then we need merely laugh in relief! Just be a dear and tell me what happens. Every little detail,” said Core 219 with a wink before {Teleporting} away. And just so you know, she sung the chant to the tune of some song or another.

Niku had recovered by the time I finished talking with Core 219, so I transformed into a mouse again and off we went back to town.

“Haaah, haaah... We’re here.” Niku ran at full speed for an extended period of time on the way back too, but once again, that just made her a little tired. *What a monster! She’s made of stamina! No, wait, it’s gotta be the golem assistance. Yeah, it’s all the golem. Right. Yeah.*

I went to my room and canceled my {Ultra Transformation}.

“Thanks, Niku. Get some rest.”

“I will.”

I passed my futon to Niku and went to check up on Rokuko.

“Oh, Keima.”

“Hello there, Keima. Forgive my intrusion.” Inside Rokuko’s room was Maiodore, the blue-haired drill loli. She must have gotten worried about Rokuko. Who, by the way, was sitting up in bed to talk. She must have gotten a lot better. She had two covers on, which was kind of weird? Oh, the top one was the Divine Futon all spread out. She was probably doubling up on covers to maximize comfort.

“Did you drop by to check up on Rokuko?”

“Yes, I heard she was sick. I am... shall I say, glad to see that she seems healthier than I expected?” said Maiodore, glancing at the covers.

Oh yeah, Maiodore owns the Divine Pillow. Maybe she can identify the Divine Futon on sight. It definitely does look more heavenly than your

average futon. Not to mention that it's put on display in the Beddhist church all the time.

"I still feel a little dizzy, but I am feeling a lot better."

"Yes, which is why you must stay in bed, Rokuko." Maiodore probably knew Rokuko was feeling better thanks to the Divine Futon.

"Your maid didn't stop you from dropping by? I would think she'd be afraid of you getting sick."

"Yes, well. As this is the family of my beloved fiancée we are talking about, I overruled her objections. Especially since I had something to lend her."

"Oh, right, Keima. Look at what Maiodore lent me." Rokuko pointed at the pillow on her bed. It looked like a normal reflex pillow at first glance, but it radiated a divine aura that was impossible to miss. There was no mistaking it. That was the Divine Pillow.

"So? I bet you're jealous."

"Ngh, I'm so jealous! I mean... uh. Are you sure about this, Mai?"

"I do not mind Rokuko borrowing it. The Divine Pillow has restorative properties just as the Divine Futon does, after all. Oh, but do not let anyone else use it, Rokuko. Please return it as soon as you're well again."

"Of course, I'm just borrowing it."

"...I can only wonder if anything I've lent to Keima has been returned."

Huh? Did I ever borrow something from her? That's not ringing any bells.

Anyway, I wonder what powers the Divine Pillow has. Consider me curious. And on that note, I wonder if Mai knows what powers the Divine Futon has.

"Thanks, Maiodore. You can eat as many purins as you want today."

"My! Thank you very much, Rokuko." Maiodore stood up from her chair with a giggle.

"With my gift delivered, I believe it is time for me to depart. I would not want to stop you from getting the rest you need." Maiodore gave a small bow and left the room.

"...Let me touch the pillow for a second."

"Not a chance. You heard Maiodore say not to let anyone else use it."

Ngh, what a nightmare. She did say that, but come on! At least let me touch it!

"Why did Maiodore bring it herself instead of having her maid deliver it for her? Think about it."

"Ngh!" *Because divine punishment might fall on anyone who touches it...? Crap, I shoulda tried touching it while Maiodore was here. I could*

have learned something from how she reacted to that.

“...Guess I’ll ask if I can touch it when you’re giving it back.”

“Good luck. Mnn... Well, I’m going to try and sleep a bit...”

Rokuko buried her face into the pillow. *Whoa, whoa, isn’t it hard to breathe like that? I mean, you don’t have to breathe, but still...*

“.....”

“Uh, Rokuko?”

“Not only does it feel unbelievably nice and soft like Kinue’s boobs, I can breathe right through it like it’s not even there... It smells super nice, too...”

Seriously? Guess it’s not the Divine Pillow for nothing.

“Before you fall asleep, is there anything you want me to do?”

“...Wait, you don’t mind?” Rokuko rolled over and poked her head out from beneath the covers to look at me.

“Sure, if it’s not too much.”

“...Okay, I want you to get in bed with me as Succubus Keima.”

Whew lad.

“Sorry, I’ve gotta figure out what’s getting you sick right now. Not to mention that those two parts of the Divine Bedding might hit me with divine punishment.”

“...Then I want you to stay with me here as much as you can,” said Rokuko while looking at me apologetically.

Alright then, guess I’ll stay in this room when I’m using the menu monitor to search through the dungeon and stuff. I know how scary it can be when you’re sick.

* * *

Anyway, I left Rokuko in bed, knowing that I could count on the Divine Pillow’s restorative properties. Rei and the others were working to fill the gap left by Rokuko’s absence. I hadn’t given them any instructions, but they were even taking shifts to watch over her. As always, I was blessed with only the most skilled of subordinates. It would have been nice to summon another set of Silkies to help out, but that option was in the middle of being sealed off. Indeed, the monster summoning function was blocked off. It looked like I could still place traps, but...

Anyway. I had sent word to Haku, but there was no guarantee she would know what to do in this situation. Ittetsu and Core 219 were both pretty old but had no idea what was going on. Which meant I needed to investigate what was going on myself to be sure.

That traveling merchant was naturally the first thing I thought of. I opened the menu and set about learning what I could about him. I would want to pay special attention to what he did right before leaving. Rokuko said he left while she was briefly distracted from

watching him.

...Alright, the monitor function is still working. I can view past footage, but the question is whether there's any footage to view. Any time you looked through the dungeon monitor, that footage was stored in perpetuity. For example, if you used the monitor to peek on a girl taking a bath, you could rewatch that footage for the rest of time. It was like a more functional version of trying to replay videos in your head. But on the other hand, you couldn't watch anything that had happened without being seen on the monitor.

The monitor wasn't just functioning on its own twenty-four seven like a security camera, so the question was whether Rokuko kept the monitor on him while looking away, or if he was coincidentally in footage shot elsewhere. Also, no deleted footage could be seen again.

I opened a folder of past recordings. *Man, using this menu really does feel like tapping a tablet's touch screen... but anyway. I guess the time frame for the merchant leaving was way back here?*

"Gah, it's all buggy. How?" Some of the file names were composed of buggy, unreadable text. I thought at first it might just be a visual thing, but the files didn't react when I tapped them. *This must have something to do with Rokuko being sick too. Let's see, and as for the merchant... Alright. Some of the files are buggy, but I can see most of them. There's a lot of footage here, probably since I told Rokuko to keep an eye on him.*

"....." I opened multiple files at once and watched them simultaneously. I sped up the footage where he was alone, put it back to normal speed when he talked to someone, enhanced to spot details... That would be a lot of wasted time if he wasn't responsible, but as I couldn't think of anyone else suspicious, this was the best I could do.

I went ahead and checked all the videos I could.

.....

.....

.....

"...Crap, all that for nothing." I cradled my head. I more or less expected that since Rokuko hadn't noticed him leave or anything, but still. A solid day had passed since Rokuko got sick. Maybe I needed a break.

"Wazzup Rokuko, I'm coming in. Oh, watcha doing here, Master?"

"Investigating. How's work, Ichika? Sorry for not helping you at all."

"Don't sweat it, the Succubi are really pulling their weight. I mean, Rokuko getting sick is some serious business, so yeah."

Oh, huh, the Succubi are helping.

"Hm? Woah, Master. Checking out this... traveling merchant?"

Ichika peered at my opened menu.

“Yeah, I was seeing if he had anything to do with Rokuko getting sick. I was just about to give up, though.”

“Yeah, I don’t blame you for suspecting him. He’s hella suspicious.”

Huh?

“Wait, Ichika. Why do you think he’s suspicious?”

“I mean, look at the dude. He’s acting like a traveling merchant but he’s totally walking like a trained assassin.”

Uh.

“Wait wait wait. Seriously, wait. An assassin? Where are you getting that from?”

“He’s got the kinda awkward strut of someone used to walking silently but forcing themselves to make noise. The sound of each footstep is way too concentrated. And notice how he’s standing up straight? That alone makes you wonder what the heck he does for a living, but traveling merchants are always walking around with heavy stuff on their back. A traveling merchant standing straight after that? No way. Plus, it’s suspicious that he’s not trying to make a name for himself to spread his business. Proof he’s doing something he doesn’t want people noticing. Oh, and there are definitely assassin tools hidden in his clothes. See that spot of his pants leg? How it’s a little stiff? Yeah, that’s a throwing knife.”

Uhhhh, huh. Today I learned that Ichika has the eyes of a hawk. Or maybe this is just normal for a C-Rank adventurer? Nah, that’d be crazy. If people like this are walking all over the place then I’m basically a saint.

“That’s pretty impressive, Ichika. I’m surprised you could figure all that out.”

“Aaah, well, it’s half just ’cause I got to see him up close on a video. Truth is, I barely even noticed him until you pointed him out. Basically impossible to notice assassin tools if you’re not looking for them ahead of time, confirmation bias is actually important here. He might have a subterfuge skill, too.”

...I would have missed him too if not for his abnormal amount of DP per day. Probably.

“So, what about him?”

“Uh, actually, do you know anyone who talked to him?”

“Mmm, not really, but I can go hunt for info. If I say he might’ve gotten Rokuko sick, I’m sure reports will come rolling in.”

Is it just me or is Ichika a little too reliable? Or maybe this is just normal for C-Rank adven— (I’m repeating myself.)

Anyway, Ichika went ahead and started gathering info for us. For safety’s sake I had her not mention Rokuko’s poor health, but even so she came back before two hours were up.

“Here’s a list of everyone he talked to! But to be real, Wozma pretty much made this himself.” Wozma was the vice town chief and owner of the local bar. In secret he was a former government official who worked in Haku’s castle. Paperwork like a list of names was his speciality.

“Thanks. Guess I’ll check the videos to see what he bought and who he sold things to whi—”

“Oh, the list has most of that too. Dude, everyone was all jumping to help the second I dropped your name. Pretty much every town citizen that talked to him said everything they know. Sure is nice being a town chief, huh?” Ichika cackled.

...*Yeah, it is nice.* I looked over the list.

“...No problem with this guy, nor this guy. There sure are a lot of these... Wait.” The last name on the list was, “Isam: Bought black somethings. Bugs?”

“Oh, that. People nearby remembered it. Apparently Isam went and bought some black bug-looking things, though nobody could hear what they were saying to figure out why. Thing is, Isam doesn’t remember that and the bugs aren’t with his stuff, which is suspicious as heck.”

“Yeah, those bugs seem pretty suspicious to me.”

“Some people saw Isam going to the dungeon that night. It was pretty late and most people weren’t going to the dungeon themselves, but there was that party going on and the bar’s near the dungeon. Wasn’t too hard for people spot him. But again, Isam don’t remember squat about it.”

In other words, it’s possible he was being controlled.

“...Isn’t it kinda weird how many people were watching all this?”

“It’s a small town, dude, people remember things. And merchants usually stick to places with a lot of people. All I had to say was, ‘that weird traveling merchant that’s kinda easy to forget about,’ and everyone instantly knew who I was talking about. Haha! He probably got lazy and leaned too hard on his subterfuge skills.”

Man, now I’m scared. I should probably be more careful when I’m doing Dungeon Master things.

Anyway, the intel Ichika gathered had given me a valuable lead. Isam had probably got to the dungeon and planted those black bugs or whatever inside. Which left only one thing to do.

“Time to check the dungeon for anything strange.” First was the map. Despite how he seemed, Isam was actually a fairly skilled adventurer. He managed to get all the way to the storage room area during our duel to get gifts for Ichika.

Which meant I needed to search from the entrance to the storage room area... *Yeah, that’s a lot of space.* I’m gonna need to split this

workload up. I opened my menu and contacted the three monster girl administrators of our dungeon.

“Rei, Kinue, Neruneh. I’m checking over the dungeon. Anyone who’s free, lend a hand.”

“I am free right now. I will leave the rest to the Succubi and begin at once.”

“The Silkies can cover me. Meals will be limited to what’s on the menu, but that should be fine.”

“I can’t go to my lab like this so I’m free toooooo!”

All three of them replied to me at once. They were working in the church, cafeteria, and inn respectively, but this took priority. The source of all our lives and income was in a pinch. Now wasn’t the time to be worrying about side jobs.

Oh, and right. Neruneh can’t enter her lab without using the place function of the menu. Heh.

The three of them came to me immediately after replying. Stealthily, so as to not wake Rokuko.

“Good to see you all. No time for pleasantries, though. Rei, you search from the entrance to the storage area. Kinue, you do the reverse and start in the storage area. Neruneh, you search the other areas. I’ll look everywhere I can.”

“Sir yes sir!” saluted Rei.

“Understood,” bowed Kinue.

“I’ll do my beeeest,” drawled Neruneh.

I opened my map. Despite the state Rokuko was in, the dungeon looked the same as ever.

Three hours passed since we started searching through the dungeon.

“Found it!” yelled Kinue and Rei at once, having found it at the same time somehow. They were both pointing at the same point on the map. It was a corner of the labyrinth area. There was something there that didn’t register as a foe, ally, or an item.

“There’s something here. I’ve marked it as an enemy! And given it a tag!”

“I will open a video stream.” Rei dotted it with the red of an enemy. Kinue then opened it on the monitor. There we saw a large, pitch-black snake as thick as an arm. It had no face, but on one end there was a hole with jagged saw-like teeth circling it.

Wasn’t this thing supposed to be in like a bottle or something...? Did it grow this much in a single day? Not to mention, there was something odd about what we were seeing.

“What...? Something’s not right...” I looked closer at the video and saw that it appeared to be burrowing into the wall.

“Ummm, the dungeon walls, are filled with hooooles?” said Neruneh, knocking me back to my senses. The dungeon function to repair walls... unusable. And the snake thing was doing the unthinkable.

“It’s eating... the dungeon?” The snake, clouded in black mist on top of its already pitch-black skin, bit a chunk out of the dungeon wall and absorbed it with its mist. It then grew even bigger.

“Ngghaaah!” Rokuko jerked on the bed behind me. The monitor shut off at the same time.

“Rokuko!”

“The monitor is blocked off now! Rei, what about yours?”

“Mine won’t open either! Master! How is Rokuko?!”

“...Hard to say she’s okay. Fuck, that snake thing’s definitely causing all this! It eats dungeons, so I’m gonna call it a Dungeon Eater! Let’s go take it out!” I stood up... and immediately collapsed.

* * *

“Ngh... W-Wait, where am I...?” When I woke up, I saw what seemed to be bulging clouds of linen blocking my view of the ceiling.

“Finally woke up, my dude?” said somebody very nearby as whatever my head was resting on shifted.

Oh, this is a lap pillow. Which means these clouds are Ichika’s tits. Why are they so massive? I can’t even see her face.

With nothing else, I sat up (“Bro, my legs! Pins and needles!”) while taking care not to hit her boobs (“Gyahaa it tickles!”) with my head. *Sorry Ichika, the faster I sit up the faster I’ll get better. Thanks for putting a blanket on me, though.*

“How long was I out?”

“Like three hours... Ngghh, my leeeegs. Now I get why you gotta love someone to give ’em lap pillows...” Ichika trembled as pins and needles shot through her legs.

“...How’s the Dungeon Eater?”

“Niku and I killed the shit out of it as soon as we could. Wasn’t too bad. Though it kinda turned into a black mist and just disappeared once we killed it.” The monitor was functioning again. The holes eaten in the dungeon walls were filling back up too.

“How’s Rokuko?”

“Still seems kinda sick, but it looks like she’s getting better.”

I glanced over and saw Rokuko sleeping. Her cheeks were red and sweat was beading on her forehead. *Yeah, she doesn’t look better yet to me. Might be smart to put the Divine Futon straight onto her Core body.*

“Anyway, good job. You should go get some rest.”

“Same to you, Master.”

...So she said, but not all of the dungeon functions were back. We

still couldn't summon monsters, use the place function, and so on.

"How long did it take for the monitor function to come back?"

"Hm? Dunno, I just noticed it was back outta nowhere. Guess we just gotta wait a little longer?"

"Nggghaaaah..." Rokuko let out a pained groan. That gave me a bad feeling, so I opened the menu and saw that buying things from the DP catalog was now blocked off.

"...There's another one."

"Say what?!"

I started to summon the three monster girls, but then noticed an oddly placed enemy marker on the map I had left open.

"It's in the walls..." Indeed, it was in the walls. Perhaps the Dungeon Eaters were marked on the map now that we had identified them as enemies.

"Turn the map to 3D, and... It's right here." I pointed to where it was, using the length and width as a reference to find it. It was inside the walls where normally nothing should go. I set the monitor on it so we could see. Onscreen was a large black creature curled into a ball within a rock cavern it had presumably eaten out itself. *It's hard to tell without any frame of reference, but it looks bigger than the first one?* It had eaten through a wall in the labyrinth area and was now in the floor beneath it.

"...Dude, how're we supposed to fight this thing?"

"How about we send a small golem into the hole after it?"

"Not gonna work. It gave Niku a little trouble, so like, a regular old golem would be toast."

"We can just possess the monster wi— Tch, nope, that function's blocked." To make matters worse, the function for controlling monsters was sealed. Our limit was just giving general instructions to them. Golems we couldn't control had fairly limited combat potential.

As for repairing the walls — no good. The function was blocked. But even if it wasn't, this thing was a pro at eating dungeons, unlike Suzuki. It would eat its way out of any walled prison we tried making.

Suddenly, the Dungeon Eater lifted its head. Though, it was less a head and just a sudden gap, a mouth with pointed teeth surrounding it. The red within the mouth was facing the monitor.

"...Don't tell me it's looking at us."

"I dunno, but what the heckaroo?!"

It opened its mouth wide at the monitor and surged forward in a massive bite. The monitor stopped working again. He ate it. He ate the dungeon function. *Sounds weird, but that has to be it.*

"Tch... I can't believe he was actually looking at us."

"Master! The Dungeon Eater's doing something!"

I checked the map and saw that the red dot representing the

Dungeon Eater was heading straight down, ignoring all of our dungeon puzzles. I set the map to display the whole dungeon to see where the Eater was headed. The silver lining was that since it was going straight and ignoring all walls, it was easy to predict where it was going.

“Yeah... Figures. What else could it be?” He was heading to our deepest Core Room. The one with the real Dungeon Core.

...On top of that, the castling function with Dummy Cores was sealed. *Is it just me, or has castling consistently been the least useful function of them all?*

Given how fast it was moving, we didn’t have much leeway. I smacked the sleepiness out of my body and headed to the dungeon with Niku and Ichika in tow. Rei and the other girls weren’t with us for two reasons: one, I wanted to enter with my adventurer party so that those seeing us wouldn’t grow suspicious of anything, and two, it was possible that they would suddenly grow sick due to the problems with the dungeon.

...We wouldn’t be able to meet up in the dungeon either without the placement function. So instead, I asked Rei and the others to take care of Rokuko while keeping an eye out for any other Dungeon Eaters. There didn’t seem to be any at a glance, but better safe than sorry.

“Let’s go.”

Niku and Ichika both nodded, fully equipped for battle. We went inside the dungeon, and at first glance nothing seemed unusual. Other adventurers were coming and going like it was nothing. But as we spoke, the dungeon... Rokuko was suffering.

I checked the map to see where the Dungeon Eater was. We didn’t have much time left. I thought about directing the Haniwa Golem to the Core Room, but it would be too cramped for him to do much. Not to mention that the path there was so complex and filled with narrow passageways that just reaching it would be hard for him. We had to get there as fast as possible.

“Let’s hurry. We’re taking the fastest way there.”

We blasted through the entrance area and went to the labyrinth area. Along the way we passed by several adventurers whom we ran past while giving brief greetings. I thought we would get through the whole labyrinth area the same way, but...

“Wait... Sori— Ichika!”

“Puhleeze, Isam, get it right already.” We bumped into Isam while he was exploring the dungeon with his little sister Mimiko. “But anyway, we’re busy. Later.”

“Wait! Keima, duel me! Fight me for Ichika!” He actually stood in front of the hall and blocked our path.

“Isam! Now’s not the time for games, get the heck outta our faces!”

“Not a chance. If you want me to leave, Keima, fight me! An honorable one-on-one duel!”

Honestly, at this point, nobody could blame me if I accidentally killed him in a fight.

“You caught me at a bad time. Alright, I’ll take your duel.”

“Alright! Let’s ge—”

“But can you really call it an honorable duel when I’m a back row support and you’re a fighter?” I asked, making Isam fall silent.

“Whatever, I’ve got things to do. I’m gonna get this over with quick.”

“Alright, gimme your best s—”

“O Fire, O Water, O Earth, O Wind, O Light, O Darkness — Defeat mine enemy. {Fireball}, {Water}, {Earth Bind}, {Air Voice}, {Light}, {Blind}.” I decided to just blast Isam with magic to knock him out of the way. He was in the middle of saying something, but I didn’t care. I was mad and just cast all the low-rank spells I knew at once. I didn’t need to make the chant, but I did just for appearances sake. My mental image of the spell was binding the enemy and blowing them away.

The six low-rank spells drained my mana, a small enough amount for me to naturally recover over a few seconds, and then... mixed together. *Crap, I should’ve had a clearer mental image. Or maybe my frustration is just getting in the way.*

The combined mana exploded in the direction I was pointing. I hurriedly moved my hand to the side, but part of the spell still managed to hit Isam.

...The nearby Clay Golem that got hit head-on evaporated, but Isam survived with only some burns and being knocked unconscious. *Whew, that was close. I almost did kill him by accident. Oh, looks like Ichika pulled Mimiko to safety. Guess everything’s fine now.*

“...Dude, what was that?”

“...Think of it as my ultimate move.” I had never seen it before either, but it actually seemed pretty strong. Maybe I should name it Element Burst or something cool like that. *Yeah, I’ll have to remember to chant that next time.*

“Anyway, the small fry’s out of the way. Let’s get going.”

“R-Right. That sure ended fast. Later, Mimiko. Isam’s all yours.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, my brother is always so awful...” Mimiko bowed repeatedly as she moved aside for us.

Yeah, it’s all Isam’s fault. You’re fine. I gave her a wave and hurried on without turning around.

After that we managed to reach the hidden area — the room with the real Dungeon Core placed in it — without encountering any real

obstacles. The Dungeon Eater wasn't there yet. We made it. But only by a couple of minutes at best.

"Th-That was pretty close..." I said, gasping for air.

"We might not've made it if that idiot was a little stronger."

It would've been faster to have Niku carry me again, but I could only use {Ultra Transformation} three times in one day. It was a possible trump card and I needed to save it.

I collected myself. Breath in, breath out... Okay. I was ready. I checked the map for the Dungeon Eater.

"...It's here! Above us!" The ceiling above us crumbled as the massive Dungeon Eater, about eighty centimeters wide, burst out of the ceiling while chomping rock along the way. It then fell to the ground, carried by its own weight. At a glance it was easily over three meters long. There was still more of it coming out of the ceiling.

"PIKYURAAAAAAA!" It let out a bizarre sounding scream and turned to face us.

"Holy shit, it's so big! How did it get this big?! Was the one Niku beat this big?!"

"I'm pretty sure it was hella smaller! It didn't scream like that, either!"

"That doesn't matter. We just have to kill it."

Oh, Niku's got a point. Doesn't matter how big it is, we've still gotta kill it. And it should be safe to say it got bigger since it hid in the walls and absorbed a lot more of the dungeon's power.

"Right, let's get to work. Ichika, hold it down! I'll blast it with an Element Burst... With that thing I just did, try not to get hit!"

"Gaaaah! You got it, Master!"

"Master, what should I do?"

"Protect the Core! Don't let that thing touch it!"

Ichika stomped on the Dungeon Eater to hold it down. It was as thick as a log and attacked Ichika while floundering on the floor like a fish out of water.

"Gaaah, don't look at me! I'm gonna puke! Master, kill it already!"

The Dungeon Eater continued to slither out of the crumbling ceiling while bouncing around. *Wait, isn't it longer than it looked on the monitor a second ago? Sheesh, whatever, here goes!*

"Power's important here. I'll use a chant to boost its strength. Alright! O Fire, O Water, O Earth, O Wind, O Light, O Darkness! Defeat mine enemy! {Element Burst}!" A massive amount of mana swirled in front of me like a whirlpool. It was reacting to my sincere desire to kill my enemy as soon as possible.

I concentrated the mana so that it wouldn't hit Ichika by accident. Then, a stream of light shot out of the whirlpool and headed straight for the Dungeon Eater. Ichika narrowly dodged it.

“Ohmigosh ohmigosh! Friggin’ geez, dude! I woulda died for reals if that hit me!”

A second later, the Dungeon Eater’s head exploded in a storm of guts. However... The rest of its body pushed out meat that grew into another head. It then turned its mouth towards us hatefully.

“PURYURAAAA! PIRIRIRIRIIII!” Its blood red mouth mixing with the black mist made it look extremely vicious.

“Tch. That’s some crazy regeneration. Did the one Niku killed do that?”

“No, the one I fought went down easily.” Which meant that this one had powered up quite a lot.

“Ichika, I’m gonna give it another shot. Hold him down again.”

“Oh man, I hate this, but you got it. Hyah!” Ichika dashed forward to stomp again — only for a wall to appear out of nowhere in front of her.

“Bwuh, wha, bpfff?!” Ichika slammed hard into the wall.

“Are you okay?!”

“Guh, guuuuh, my friggin’ nose... But, I-I’m okay! Hyah!” She dashed around the wall to give it another shot. But another wall popped up to get in the way of her feet. She ended up kicking the wall.

“Gaaah! Come on! I’ll get you this time!”

“Ichika, don’t worry about it! The walls are gonna box you in.”

“Really?! Oh man, you’re right! This is messed up!”

I cast {Element Burst} again. This time, I focused it into a tighter beam while keeping its strength the same.

“Charge — {Element Burst}!” A thinner beam of light than before burst out and pierced the Dungeon Eater, swinging vertically. I saw the light slicing the Dungeon Eater to bits, popping out on the other end with the burnt meat steaming, but...

“Oh man oh man, he regenerated again! Dang it!” Meat bubbled out from within to regenerate all the parts that had been sliced off.

“That’s some fast recovery. Ichika, what do you think we should do?”

“Kill it until it stops regenerating or drag it outside and make it somebody else’s problem, I guess? Dunno what else we could do.”

“...Yeah, me neither. We can’t let something that eats dungeons live. Let’s keep on killing it.” But the moment I said that, the Dungeon Eater began twisting its body — it even pulled its tail out of the ceiling and coiled around itself, changing shape. If it was an eighty centimeters thick and eight meters wide massive earthworm before, now it was a hundred and fifty centimeters thick and three meters long snake. But since its head was the same size, it was more like a giant leech?

“Oh no, Master! I can’t hold this thing down!”

“Tch, but now it’s a bigger target! I can hit it! {Element Burst}!”
Light shot toward the Dungeon Eater. But it hid behind a wall.

Moments later, I heard the sound of two objects colliding, hard. I turned around and saw that the Dungeon Eater had tried to tackle the Dungeon Core, only to be blocked by Niku with her Golem Knife. It must have used the wall as footing to leap toward the Core. *Good job stopping it, Niku!*

“I won’t let you!” She then pushed it back through sheer force. Just what I would expect from our dungeon’s ultimate weapon, the strongest dog loli to ever live. With one blow she flawlessly protected our Dungeon Core. The Dungeon Eater was sent flying back, slamming into a wall like a tossed ball.

“Good job, Niku! Time to finish it o—” Just as I started to cast {Element Burst} again, the Dungeon Eater arched its back and shot its head down, taking a bite from the floor with the ease of one scooping up ice cream with a spoon. *That’s gonna be the last bite of dungeon you ever take.*

“{Element Burst}!” But the Dungeon Eater made a wall between us to buy time. By the time the light smashed through it, the Dungeon Eater had vanished inside a massive hole.

“...Crap! He ran away!” Still, he would have to come back here sooner or later. His ultimate goal was no doubt to eat the dungeon, which meant he would be back for the Co—

“Master! The Dungeon Eater is heading for the quarantine zone!” Rei contacted me. It seemed she had been watching the Dungeon Eater here despite instructions to search the map.

“The quarantine zone... Suzuki Wall?!”

“Yes, he is heading straight for it!”

“Let’s go, Ichika! We’re following it!”

“Wha, me?!”

“Master?”

“Only you can protect the Core on your own, Niku! That’s Rokuko’s body, take care of it!” I jumped into the Dungeon Eater’s hole without waiting for Niku’s reply. It was smooth and I slid down it like a slide into the quarantine zone — the room where we had secured Suzuki’s wall, located diagonally down from the Core Room. Reaching it normally was fairly elaborate, but none of it meant anything to the Dungeon Eater’s feeding.

“Wait, oh crap! {Ultra Transformation}!” I came out of the ceiling and flew straight for the floor at max speed, so I hurriedly transformed into a mat. A mat wearing my clothes (i.e. me) slammed onto the ground.

“Gyaaaaah! Umph!” Ichika, following behind me, landed on top of

the mat (me). She seemed to be fine. I immediately undid the transformation.

“Kyah! Sorry Master I’ll get off!” shouted Ichika, talking extremely fast.

“Where’s the Dungeon Eater?!”

“In front of you!” answered Rei.

I got up and saw the Dungeon Eater headed toward Suzuki’s wall while swaying its head side to side, almost as if it was sniffing the air. *You know, that thing might be blind. Kind of like a mole.*

“{Element Burst}...!” I shot the ray of light a bit diagonally so it wouldn’t hit Suzuki’s wall, but the Dungeon Eater flung itself sideways to dodge it. *Crap, it’s so fast! I’ve gotta find a way to stop it from moving...*

“Master, look! Over there!”

“Huh? Oh!” I looked where Ichika was pointing and saw the Daiframe, the orichalcum Construction Golem I had made to move Suzuki’s wall. We had just left it here and forgotten about it entirely.

“Ichika, think you can use it?”

“Yeah! Just buy some time for me to get in!”

“No problem!” After Ichika started running for the Daiframe, I cast {Element Burst}... not. I cast {Summon Gargoyle}. Numbers were important when it came to buying time. Luckily, this was a fairly large room since I wanted Ichika to have a decent amount of space when carrying Suzuki’s wall.

Several magic circles appeared around me as I cast the spell repeatedly without chanting. Gargoyles appeared all over the room.

“Go, stop him!” The Gargoyles flapped their stone wings and flew at the Dungeon Eater.

“PUGIRIRIRIRI!” The Dungeon Eater easily destroyed them with tackles. But each tackle took a second, and those seconds added up. That said, if it ignored the Gargoyles, they would swarm and drag him back. It couldn’t get closer to Suzuki’s wall no matter what it did.

“I get it. You use that nose of yours to sniff out the smell of power, yeah? Maybe not literally, but you sense power and then eat it to make it yours.” The Dungeon Eater flailed its body angrily as it destroyed the Gargoyles, perhaps angry that there was tasty power just ahead of him and he couldn’t reach it. I tried tossing in some {Element Bursts} to the mix, but it avoided them by using Gargoyles as shields. The Gargoyles could slow him down, but not hold him down.

Suddenly, a flash of orichalcum shone.

“Hoooraaaah!” Ichika charged forward in the Daiframe. She knocked aside the Gargoyles and sent them flying back with the Dungeon Eater. There was now a huge gap between it and the Suzuki

Wall.

She chased after it and held it down firmly with her orichalcum Golem arms. The Dungeon Eater flailed, but her arms were on another level. She didn't let it go. It couldn't get away!

"Nooow!"

"{Element Burst}! {Element Burst}!" I shot out my ultimate move so many times I lost count. I constrained the beams so they didn't hit Ichika while tearing the Dungeon Eater apart.

"PIGYOOOOOO!" But the second I thought we got him, multiple magic circles formed in the air around the Dungeon Eater. *What?!*

"Ichika, get back!"

"Bruh, monsters?! He can summon monsters?!" The Dungeon Eater summoned giant beetle-esque bugs surrounded in the same black fog as him. Was it a magic spell? No. I only managed to read a bit of the magic circle, but I caught a few words: Summon monster, bug, Dungeon Points, 50... To repeat, Dungeon Points. That could only mean one thing.

"It's using the dungeon's monster summoning function?! Is there anything it can't do?!" The bugs were about fifty centimeters wide, big in comparison to other bugs and small in comparison to the Eater. Collectively they would make short work of Ichika in her Daiframe. "I'll provide some support! Autotracking {Fireball} times thirty!" Balls of fire appeared in the air and chased after the bugs, burning each one they hit. The charred corpses vanished with a puff of black mist before they hit the ground. *They don't leave corpses even though they're monsters summoned with the dungeon function? Maybe that's just the kind of monster they are.*

"Right on, Master! Hyaaaaah!"

"Pugyuuuuu! Ryaaaaaah!" The Dungeon Eater screamed as it fell to the floor after being slammed against the ceiling. It made walls to separate it from Ichika, but they couldn't stand against Daiframe's orichalcum might. She smashed, smashed, smashed through stone walls to chase after it. The Dungeon Eater used that opportunity to lunge toward me, but...

"Never turn your back in a fiiiight!"

"PUYRU!" She grabbed onto it with the Daiframe.

"Now, Master!"

"Right! {Element Burst}!" I, having turned into a mobile cannon, tore the Dungeon Eater apart with beams. By this point I knew how to manage the flow of mana to not hit Ichika as well. *Y'know, this is kinda making me feel like I'm actually pretty strong..*

"Gah! Rokuko's in trouble, now's not the time to be having fun!" I swung my arm to slice the Eater with an {Element Burst} beam. Every part of its body that the beam touched turned to black mist and

disappeared.

“GYUPUAAA...” The Dungeon Eater let out cries of pain. But I showed no mercy.

More magic circles appeared in the air. Seeing the words Dungeon Point spelled out for the second time confirmed my suspicions. I had no hard evidence, but my intuition was loud and clear. It was using our own dungeon’s monster summoning functions.

“Give them back! Those functions you’re using belong to Rokuko’s dungeon! Our dungeon!” I sliced off its head with {Element Burst}, which I was using as a laser cutter. The spell had a low mana cost but inflicted a ton of damage — perfect for just letting loose on something. Which meant honing the beam and slicing it to bits was more effective than trying to do area of effect damage.

Ichika caught the sliced off Eater head and threw it in the air, where I used {Element Burst} in laser form to slice it to bits. The chunks turned to mist and disappeared. The magic circles in the air vanished before completing their purpose. I checked the menu.

...Yep, they’re back. As expected. We could use the monster summoning function again. It was simple: defeating the Eater gave us the functions back. That black mist wasn’t there just to give a cool miasma effect, it had the dungeon’s power mixed in with it. I couldn’t hold back a grin.

“If you’re gonna steal from people... You’ve gotta be ready for them to take it all back and more! Now, spit it all out! Give! Back! My! Dungeon! This dungeon... Rokuko belongs to me!”

...Huh? The black mist’s clinging to me. Or wait, is this me stealing it back? From the Dungeon Eater? Feels like that’s what’s happening. I can feel the power flowing through me. I could cast magic forever like this.

“PUGYUUU...” As the Eater sprouted another head, I made myself clear. It would give everything back. It would put my property back where it belonged.

I sliced in cross shapes and grid shapes, slicing it to tiny bits. The Dungeon Eater’s black body shrunk with each slice until eventually only a tiny bug the size of a pointer finger remained. That was its real body. I could tell. That huge body had all just been a shell for it.

“Piriii...”

“Don’t try acting all weak now. You’re not cute at all. Die and never come back.” With one last {Element Burst} — a real blast this time, not a laser — I burnt the Dungeon Eater into oblivion. There was a sizzling like water being poured onto hot iron, and then it was gone. Not a trace of the bug in sight.

“...Whew.” I finally let out a sigh.

“Master? Uh, you okay?” asked Ichika hesitantly, still in the Daiframe.

“Huh? Yeah, I’m fine. The threat’s been eliminated. And y’know, I actually feel pretty great. Feels like I could do anything right now. Bit hungry, though.”

“Master. You going off your rocker or something?”

“What? I don’t follow. Am I acting weird?”

“I mean, you normally act pretty weird, but uh... You’re looking pretty out of wack right now. It’s kinda scary.”

Really? It’s that bad? Lemme just buy a mirror with DP. Yep, I can buy items with DP again. Just gotta take a look, aaand...

“...Why am I black?” My skin had turned pitch black, so black it seemed to reflect no light at all. *What the hell? Niku has pure white skin compared to this.*

“Dude, I dunno how to say this, but you might’ve gotten cursed.”

Nah nah nah nah. No way. Me? Cursed? Hahaha... Ha...?

“...Anyway, I should get to fixing the dungeon walls.” I opened the menu to use the dungeon wall repairing function, and... it was blocked. I looked up and after a second of thought lifted up my hand towards the hole in the ceiling, then clenched it. The dungeon walls started repairing themselves. *Oh man. Ohhhh man.*

“.....”

“Ummm, Master. What’s going on?”

There’s only one answer here. Looks like I’ve stolen the Dungeon Eater’s functions. Or to be more wordy, I stole Rokuko’s functions from the Dungeon Eater who stole them from her. Yeah, I don’t know how this is supposed to work. If my status as a Hero let me absorb the Dungeon Core power through the Dungeon Eater, there’s probably a lot of minor problems bubbling beneath the surface right now. Which means... Well, I don’t know what let this happen, but I get the feeling that me having this power is very, very bad. How can I give it back...?

“...Hmmm.” Focusing my mind on giving it back didn’t do anything. It was possible that Rokuko’s dungeon functions would turn into a Hero power if I stayed like this.

Let’s see. We got the powers back from the Dungeon Eaters by killing them, so... Wait. Am I gonna have to kill myself to get Rokuko her powers back? Aaah, I mean, I guess that’s not too hard.

“Alright, time to die for a bit. You’ll know what to do, Ichika.”

“Wha? I’m not following, dude.”

“This is probably gonna be gruesome, so I would close my eyes if I were you. And... {Ultra Transformation}, Leona!” I exploded with a pop.

“M-Masteeeeer?!”

...After coming back to life, I was told Rokuko successfully got her powers back.

Epilogue

“Are you friggin’ dumb? Like, for real?”

“...I’m really sorry. Seriously, I’m sorry.” I was listening to Ichika’s angry lecture while resting in a futon in my room. Despite having told her that I would come back to life if I died while transformed, I hadn’t mentioned that the sheer might of curses aimed at Leona would make me explode if I transformed into her, so my stunt terrified the hell out of her. *In my defense, like, it takes a lot of resolve to kill yourself and I honestly dunno what I would have done without Leona’s transformation. Does she not know how valuable a method to instantly die really is? Seriously.*

“You listening to me?! I was hella worried about you, bub!”

“Yeah. I definitely wasn’t thinking ahead enough. It would’ve been pretty bad if there was another Dungeon Eater.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about! Geez.”

“Ichika,” interjected Rokuko, “I think he’s learned his lesson by now.”

“You’re too soft on him, Rokuko! If we don’t beat this lesson into his skull, he’s gonna do more crazy bullshiz in the future!”

Rokuko had made a full recovery. Only took a few seconds after I exploded, apparently. At this point, I was in a worse state due to recovering from my resurrection. *What, you already gave back the Divine Pillow? Curses.*

“Ichika. There’s a good reason for why Keima did something that crazy.”

“A reason? Well, I get that you were in danger and all that, but...”

“No, it’s nothing that complicated. It’s something a lot more simple, a personal thing for him.”

Huh? No no no, I definitely just blew up to get you your powers back. A personal thing for me? What? As I waited to find out what it was, Rokuko planted her feet firmly on the ground and spoke with her hands on her hips.

“He was sleep deprived!”

Whaaat?! I-I can’t believe it! I-I mean, I definitely had missed out on sleep to figure out what her sickness was, and now that I think about it, I definitely was sleep deprived even though I passed out for a bit!

“...Aaaah... Okay, that totally makes sense.”

Th-That’s a good enough reason for you? Well, alright. At least she’s

gonna stop lecturing me now.

“So basically, Ichika, what he needs right now is a lot of rest.”

“Sure, whatevs,” said Ichika while standing up.

Watch out, I can see up y— Eh, nevermind. Nobody can be blamed for futons being placed directly against the ground. It's not my fault I'm looking straight up. Dark white, close to gray.

“I’ll give you a pass this time, but you owe me big time. I’m talking a huge favor.”

“One favor? Sure, no problem. As long as it’s something within my power.”

“I’m gonna hold you to that. Later. Take care of him for me, Rokuko.”

“Mhm. My turn,” said Rokuko while sitting next to my head. “Sit up.”

“R-Right.” Rokuko made me sit up.

“Keima, are you hungry? You must be hungry.”

“Huh? I’m a little hungry, I guess.”

“I just so happen to have a purin with me.” Rokuko held up a purin. Then, a spoon. But she didn’t hold out either of them to me.

Yeah, I can see where this is going.

“Keima. I’ll feed you!”

“...Figures.” But I was indeed sick. No reason for me to refuse.

“Okay, open wiiiide.”

“Sur— nmph.” I ate the purin as she spooned it into my mouth. *This is kinda embarrassing, but alright.*

“Does it taste good?”

“...Yeah, sure. Tastes fine.”

“Right, right? So good. The second Ichika fed me like this I knew I could use it.”

Use it? Upfront as ever I see, Rokuko.

“Here, open wiiiide.”

“Nom.” She spooned more purin into my mouth. And that’s when it happened.

“Rokuko, are you okay?!” Haku threw the door open and burst into her room. She was carrying a mattress under her arms — a Japanese kind, known as a shikibuton. Then, she froze.

Rokuko and I froze too. *Oh, right. I forgot I sent Haku a message about this.*

Rokuko was feeding me a purin. I was letting her feed me.

“Haku! It’s so good to see you!”

“Um, ah, yes. It’s good to see you too. I’ve just been so busy lately, Rokuko, I hope you can forgive me... Oh, rather, are you feeling better? Did you get better after making Keima sick?” Haku looked back and forth between Rokuko and I. It seemed she was pretending

not to have seen Rokuko feeding me.

“Umm, Keima cured me, so I’m all better now. But he got hurt in the process and now he’s stuck in bed.”

“I see, I see.” Haku took deep breaths to calm down.

By the way, about that mattress. It looks kinda divine. Might that be the Divine Mattress?

“This won’t be necessary, then. That’s a relief,” said Haku while putting her Divine Mattress (presumably) into {Storage}.

Ah, wait! Hold on, let me touch it! Nooo!

“Oh, Haku. You shouldn’t wear shoes on tatami.”

“Hm? Oh, I’m aware. We sometimes import tatami from Wakoku.” Haku took off her shoes and exposed her glorious, tights-wrapped feet to the world. She then took out a stool from {Storage} and sat on it.

“Although comfortable, it always feels a little odd to remove my shoes in someone else’s room,” she said while opening and closing her toes.

Thank you for this visual feast. I could not have asked for a better visitor while sick.

I ended up so absorbed by Haku’s feet that Rokuko noticed my staring and jabbed me in the side. *Oof!*

“In any case, Keima, are you well enough to tell me what happened? Surely you are. You wouldn’t be playing around if you weren’t.”

“...Uhhh, right. Sure.”

“Good. Tell me everything that happened, from beginning to end,” said Haku while crossing her legs.

* * *

“...I see. In the end I didn’t need to rush here at a great cost, but it was still the right move to take.” Haku switched her crossed legs after hearing all about the Dungeon Eaters. “To think there exists bugs that eat dungeons. Do you have any video footage of them?”

“Yeah, if they aren’t broken from being eaten. And... Looks like we’re good. Here.” I showed her videos of the first Dungeon Eater we saw, then the second one charging toward the monitor with an open mouth.

“...Hm. Anything else?”

“I wouldn’t think so. We lost the monitor function after it was eaten.”

“Oh? But Keima, it looks like there’s a file after that.” Rokuko pointed at my menu, and there indeed was a video file I had no memory of. Maybe Rei had taken it...? No, the monitor was probably stuck with the Dungeon Eater until it died. Which meant...

“The Dungeon Eater was using the monitor function?”

“I see. That is possible. May I see?” asked Haku with a smile.

...But judging by the time, the video was taken during the fight. Absolutely nothing good would come from her seeing the Daifram or me using {Element Burst} without chanting.

“Let us check it first.”

“Certainly.”

I opened the video after making it so only Rokuko and I could see and hear it. As expected, it was a video of me fighting the Dungeon Eater. Or to be more precise, it was a video of me pretty much dominating the Dungeon Eater.

“If you’re gonna steal from people... You’ve gotta be ready for them to take it all back and more! Now, spit it all out! Give! Back! My! Dungeon! This dungeon... Rokuko belongs to me!”

“.....” Rokuko blushed. I avoided eye contact.



“...What in the world is on that video? May I see it?”

“Uhhh, it’s from the Dungeon Eater’s perspective, so I’m the only one on it. Not really worth watching it.” Haku asked to see with a suspicious look, and I answered while avoiding eye contact.

“R-Right. I’ll save this just in case. Geheheheh.”

“Rokuko, please.”

“.....”

Ngh! Rokuko, could you stop playing ‘Rokuko belongs to me!’ on loop while Haku’s glaring at me?! And could you stop focusing on that one part?! Come on! What did I ever do to deserve this?!!

“Okay, Rokuko, cut! Cuuuuut!”

“Awww, but why? Haku can’t hear or see it, remember?”

“I’m gonna die of embarrassment! I’m not even kidding! At least make it invisible to me too!”

“Fine, fine.” After playing it three more times, Rokuko closed the window in satisfaction.

“What in the world... Well, I suppose it doesn’t matter. If Rokuko’s happy, I’m happy.”

“Ngh... S-Same here...” Curse you, Rokuko. Did you forget I’m sick right now?

“In any case, this was quite the surprise for me. To think that a Dungeon Core could fall deathly ill.”

“This is something even you’ve never heard about, Haku?”

“...Correct. I could hardly believe it when Core 219 told me what she did. That was the first time I had ever heard of a Core falling sick without morphing into a human. This is absolutely something I will need to report to Father at the next assembly.”

Can’t say I expected it to be that big of a deal, huh.

“I pulled out my Divine Mattress and literally flew here as fast as I could.”

“...You didn’t use {Teleport}? Now that you mention it, you got here pretty fast considering Core 219 said it’d take her three days.” Only a bit more than two days had passed since I asked Core 219 to contact Haku. Barely any time had passed since when I expected her to be arriving at the capital, with right now being the start of the third day. Haku must have really rushed to get here that fast.

“I made all of my party members except Misha use {Teleport} in turn to close the distance. In the end, I teleported to Tsia all on my lonesome.” She used her closest allies as stepping stones — or maybe I should say rocket boosters? — to save on mana and get here all in one go. Makes sense. And as an aside, she left Misha behind since she was too dumb to learn {Teleport}. *Yeah, that sounds right to me.*

But all of Haku’s party members held important political and

military roles. I could only imagine how severe the impact of forcing open their schedules would be. Haku seemed to be thinking the same thing, judging by the somewhat gloomy look on her face.

"I then rode the Divine Mattress here. To summarize its powers, it has restorative properties and can fly. At max speed it is faster than a horse."

I knew that was the Divine Mattress. A flying mattress... Yeah, I want that pretty bad. I could travel while sleeping. What a beast of a mattress. Whoever made it must be a genius. It's so perfect...!

"...Well, I am just glad to see Rokuko healthy. The information about the Dungeon Eaters and traveling merchant is appreciated as well. I will distribute wanted posters for the merchant."

"For what crime?"

"High treason."

Oh yeah, the Empire is the country of dungeons. Even for those who don't know about Dungeon Cores, it's well known as a country where the economy and all the largest cities are built around dungeons. Bringing something like Dungeon Eaters into the Empire certainly is treason. Doubt anybody could complain about that.

"In that case, I'll be using him as an excuse for a lot of things."

"Feel free. By the way, I would like to stay here for the night."

"Consider the grand suite yours. Rokuku, don't worry about me. You can take Haku to her room. And Haku, since you took such a big loss to get here so fast, don't worry about paying for your room or the food. They're on the house." I presented Haku with Rokuko and a free inn room. It was the least I could do considering she would be rushing back home tomorrow with a mountain of built up work waiting for her.

"Oh, really? In that case, I'll need to give Rokuko plenty of tips to help her feel better. Shall we go? I believe I'll need to check to make sure your body's holding up okay."

"Makes sense to me. Night, Keima! Be sure to get some rest, okay?!"

"C'mon. Don't forget who you're talking to here."

Haku left the room with Rokuko (still smiling like an idiot) in tow. *Guess I'll finish this purin off.*

* * *

How to deal with Isam was kind of a tricky question. He was pretty heavily involved in our problems, having been the one to carry the Dungeon Eaters into the dungeon. But I couldn't talk to him about the dungeon, and it sounded like he was being manipulated, so... The real villain here was the traveling merchant in question, and Haku had made it known he was wanted for high treason. It was fair to say that

Isam was just another of his victims. And since that traveling merchant was the mastermind here (Note: I never said there wasn't yet another mastermind pulling the merchant's string), nothing would come from punishing Isam. I wouldn't have any excuse for punishing him, either.

But he did commit the crime of getting in my way to challenge me to a duel when I was rushing to the bottom of the dungeon. What if the Dungeon Eater got to Rokuko first and ate her thanks to him slowing us down? Yeah. He needed to be punished, at least a little. I could frame it as... eh, cooperating in searching for the wanted criminal.

With all that said, I summoned Isam to the Beddhist church.

"And that's how it is, Isam. You're gonna tell me everything you know."

"I dunno why you started this conversation like that, but uh, I'm guessing you're talking about the assassin guy? If this is about his treason, I already said everything I remember. But my memory's just so freakin' fuzzy I could barely say anything."

"Dooon't worry. That's just what you think. Memory can be a lot more reliable than you think, and sometimes memories you thought you forgot can be lurking in your head." I snapped my fingers. Ichika and Suilla, wearing a nun outfit, entered the room. As a quick reminder, Suilla is a Succubus. Yeah, you can guess where this is going.

"I'm sure we can find out more details if we give you a Beddhist style interrogation. You don't get to refuse. You lost the duel and this is an order."

"Ngh! Fine, you win."

I called it an interrogation, but it was really just charming him and unearthing his memories by force. While I was at it, I accidentally made him reveal all his fetishes and embarrassing secrets. In front of Ichika.

"Whaddaya want me to do?"

"Just relax a bit. Suilla, do it."

"...I believe it would be more efficient for you to do this, your holiness."

Yeah, not a chance in the world. I'm sick of seducing men as a Succubus.

Anyway, I made Isam expose his fetishes to Ichika, but... *There's nothing weird about having a smell fetish. I mean, that's just normal stuff. Shoes and all that. Wait, Ichika? Why are you looking away? Uh, and Suilla's giving a gentle smile... That means, 'Yes, it certainly is normal,' doesn't it? Right?* I ended the charm after wiping his memories of being charmed and revealing his fetishes. But not the other things.

“Okay, that’s it for the interrogation. Thanks for all the help.”

“...Just kill me.”

Yeah, that’s the first thing I would say too.

“Isaaaam?! What did you do with my shoooooes?! Try saying it one more tiiiime!”

“H-Hold on! I-I mean, I just love how you smell, that’s all!”

“Alriiight, time for natto! I’m gonna make him eat natto! Master!”

Aaaaah... Okay. Go ahead and have your fun, Ichika. I bought some natto (strongly fermented soybeans) with DP as I pretended to reach into {Storage}, then handed it to Ichika.

“Ngh?! What the hell is that smell?! Are those rotten?!”

“Heheh, relax, my dude. It’s fine to eat since it’s just fermented. Too bad I’m gonna stuff it all up your nose.”

“N-NOOOOO!”

Stuffing natto up a wolf’s nose? Oof, Ichika, isn’t that a bit mu— aaand up they go. Oooof. Oh, you want blue cheese too? Fine, but don’t expect any surströmming.

By the time Ichika was done with him, Isam was convulsing on the floor with his eyes rolled back into his head. *As a fellow man, I will express my sympathy by casting {Purification} to get rid of the smell. He can have the leftovers, too. Guess I’ll slip some of Ichika’s socks from my stash in as well just to seal the deal. Yeah.*

* * *

Isam calmed down a lot after all that. He wasn’t causing any problems anymore. In fact, he would sometimes sit beside me in the cafeteria and sit in a front row desk in the church. It was enough to think that maybe the smell had broken his brain.

But in truth, I knew it was thanks to me giving him Ichika’s socks. He must have interpreted that as me being a fellow man of smell. So I thought, while eating the natto Isam bought for me. *He always shouts the loudest when we’re counting sheep at mass, then falls asleep by number five.*

I was also letting Niku spar with him since he wanted to train. He probably saw my magic and wanted to learn from me, but too bad. That magic’s special. And Niku seemed happy to have a sandbag to beat the crap out of for practice. It kinda threw me off when he trained so hard he ended up asleep in front of my front door, but his fur saved him from catching a cold.

Anyway, Isam and Mimiko eventually dropped by to say goodbye — they were moving on. Most adventurers never stayed in the same place for too long. Really, they had stayed here a bit too long considering their wandering roots.

“My brother caused so many problems for you, I’m sorry. My big

dumb brother is just... Come on, Isam, apologize!”

“...Sorry.” Isam bowed his head at Mimiko’s urging. He didn’t seem to feel that he should be apologizing, and honestly I didn’t know why he needed to apologize at this point either.

“Hey, Ichika. Why are they apologizing to me?”

“Aaah... I’m guessing he kinda feels bad for all the trouble he put you through? Let us hear it, Isam.”

“Y-Yeah. That’s pretty much it.”

“Keima, you have such a big heart... Isam, I don’t think you can beat him.”

“.....” Isam grimaced a bit. I dunno why, but he didn’t seem too happy.

“Well, y’know. Cheer up. Feel free to come again if you want. Just try not to get wrapped up with another weird merchant.” I held out a hand, but he slapped it away. *Feeling shy, huh? Nice.*

“I’ve been watching you ever since I came to this town. Far as I can tell, you do take your job as town chief seriously. The people all love you.”

Uh, what? I take my job seriously? You lost me. But if that’s how it looks to outsiders, sure, alright. I can’t complain.

“...But I’m not gonna forgive you if break Ichika’s heart!”

“Huh? Uh, okay. I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Hmph!” Isam turned to look at Ichika instead of me.

“Ichika... I’m fine with anything as long as you’re happy. But if you ever want me to come kidnap you, just say the word.”

“Geez, give it a rest! Just get the heck out of here already, you dumb dog. You don’t wanna be here when Master wakes up and stops being so nice. If you know what’s good for you, you’ll find another good woman. Though you’re totally not gonna find any as good as me, just saying.”

“...I’ve gotta ask. Are you a slave because—”

“Ha! I’ve got a master this amazing, y’know? All other men just look like total trash to me.” So Ichika said, but Isam didn’t seem ready to give up on her.

“Ichika, no matter how much you love this guy, he’s not gonna—”

“Alright, Master, look this way. I’m gonna use that favor you owe me.”

“Huh? Sure, but what fo— mmggh?!” Before I could finish my sentence, Ichika kissed me. *Wha, why?! Soft lips! Is that your tongue?! What?!*

“Fwah! There you go. See, Isam, he... Isam? Hello?” Isam had frozen in place. “Whoops, guess that was a bit much for the kids in the audience. What’re you gonna do, Mimiko? Wait until he snaps out of it?”

“...I’m just going to drag him away. Ichika, we’ll be back to visit later. Keima, please take good care of Ichika.”

“R-Right.” I was kind of experiencing extreme emotional turmoil, but somehow I managed to squeeze out a reply to Mimiko. She then grabbed Isam by the back of the neck and did indeed drag him out of Goren, just as she had said she would.

“...Ichika. Where did that come from?”

“Hm? I was just like, what better favor could I ask for, y’know? Dooon’t read too deep into it, it was just a spur of the moment thing! Yup!” said Ichika with a smile.

C-Cool.

“Oh, look, here comes Rokuko. Looks like it’s time for me to split.”

“Wha?” I followed Ichika’s gaze and saw that Rokuko was running this way.

“Keima! I saw that, Keima! Why did you kiss Ichika?! Are you trying to make babies?!”

“I, uh... Didn’t I tell you kisses don’t make babies?” *Anyway, I guess that means she was watching us on the monitor. I’ve gotta delete the video of the kiss later...*

“...You’ve gotta make babies with me first, okay?! Ichika and Niku and Rei and everyone else can come after!”

“Why are you including Niku and Rei there too?”

“Whatever, just promise me! I’m first! Right now!” yelled Rokuko while repeatedly hitting me with her fists.

“Alright, alright, I promise, so stop hitting me. That actually hurts.”

“Okay! I forgive you.” Rokuko beamed a satisfied smile with her head held high.

“Wait. Hold on, Rokuko. It kinda sounds like you’re implying that I’m going to make a harem.”

“...Aren’t you? Isn’t a harem every man’s dream?”

“Where did you hear that? No. At the very least, I don’t want all the trouble that comes from a harem. I’ve got my hands full with just you, Rokuko.” *It might not look like it from her perspective, but I’m a one-track kinda guy.*

“Th-That’s good too!”

“Yup.” I patted Rokuko’s head as she blushed bright red.

Extra Episode: Wataru the Hero and his Goren Experience

Wataru the Hero was, as his name implied, a Hero summoned from another world. While in the process of being summoned, a god asked him to destroy dungeons. But he was summoned into the Laverio Empire, where he was firmly taught that dungeons must not be destroyed. Two conflicting viewpoints. Should he believe the god or the people?

To be honest, Wataru didn't worry about that too much. Reason being, the god wanted him to destroy the dungeons because they blocked the natural flow of mana by storing it for themselves. But the Empire taught him that dungeons freely released the mana in the form of monsters and items, which meant there was no need to destroy dungeons with enough people exploring them. It would actually hurt people's quality of life to do so. With that in mind, he could understand both why the god wanted dungeons gone and why it was fine to leave some alone.

So basically, Wataru viewed dungeons as factories. If left on their own they would destroy the environment, but if properly managed they were essential to a high quality of life. One could say that Wataru had gotten very lucky here. If he had just started destroying dungeons without being taught not to by his summoners, he would have been executed by Haku Laverio — the founder of the Empire — the second she got her hands on him.

Anyway, one thing led to another and Wataru began regularly patrolling the Empire's roads and dungeons to thin out monsters while keeping order. It was hard work that demanded he kill an extremely high number of monsters, and he would have been doomed if not for his hero powers, but he needed the one hundred gold coins a month. After all, he had a gambling debt of two thousand three hundred golds. But just so we're clear, he wasn't a gambling addict. He ended up with that debt after messing up only once.

"Alright! Goren, here I come!" He had to pay back his debt one hundred gold coins at a time, once a month. He was essentially losing his pay from Haku the moment he got it. Most people would get depressed and feel like they were working for nothing, but Wataru was excited. Truth be told, visiting Goren town once a month was one of the few things Wataru really looked forward to.

He entered the town, thinking briefly about how much it had developed since he first stepped foot into it, and headed straight for the inn. The inn was owned by the very man who had stomped all over Wataru's Hero cheat skill {Ultra Good Fortune} and pushed him into debt hell. Looking back, that was a valuable experience where he learned that Hero cheat skills weren't invincible. Tragic at the moment, but nostalgic now.

As an aside, the Dancing Doll Inn was also where Wataru's crush worked.

"Hmmm? Oooh, helloooo."

"Good to see you, Neruneh!" Every time Wataru came to visit, Neruneh was conveniently sitting behind the receptionist desk. The timing was always so convenient that he actually asked once if they watched the road for his arrival. Turns out, they actually did have her go out and sit behind the desk when he arrived. She didn't seem too enthusiastic about it herself, but she did it anyway.

"This time you're staying at the grand suite, riiiight?"

"No, sorry. I'd like a normal room."

"....." Neruneh fell silent with a lazy smile still on her face. Her silence carried a heavy weight. If viewed with enough bias, it might look like she was gazing upon him with a lovestruck heart. But otherwise, it was pretty clear she was telling him to spend more money.

"E-Er."

"You're staying at the grand suite, riiiight?"

"I-I'd like a normal room!"

Neruneh repeated her question, and Wataru repeated his answer. By the way, Wataru hadn't stayed at the grand suite a single time since falling into debt. And just for reference, in any other town, the inn receptionists would cry out, "Kyaaaah! We would never make you stay in a normal room, Wataru the Hero! Please, come to our best room!" without fail. That was just a fact, too. Not him deluding himself. Wataru was exceedingly popular throughout the Empire for his dedicated service toward maintaining peace and stability within the Empire, even if it was just a job he was being paid for.

"...How many daaays?"

"Just one."

"You sure that's enooough?" To be honest, he wanted to stay there thirty days a month. If only he wasn't so busy. B-But! If he worked extra hard, he should be able to free up an extra day or two!

"...Two days."

"One mooore."

"Th-Three days!"

"Thanks for your busineeess." Once again, he threw work onto his

future self so he could stay for three days. Not even a Hero could always win out against temptation. Wataru shook his head and smiled at himself.

Incidentally, no other inn would push for him to stay multiple days against his will. If he said he was staying for one day, they left it at that. In situations where he had to extend the stay to two days, only in Goren would he be pressured into adding on an extra day.

Neruneh said, “Three nights,” to the register-esque magic tool in front of her, and the price appeared on top.

“One silver and fifty coppers, pleaaase.”

“Here you are.” Wataru took out a silver and five large coppers from a leather bag and handed them over. Neruneh took the coins and put them into holes opened in the magic tool, causing a room key to drop down onto a plate.

“Here you gooo.”

“Thanks, Neruneh.” She handed him the key. Their fingers briefly touched. They then casually pulled their hands back. This interaction was very precious to Wataru, but it was hard to deny that overall he got treated pretty poorly.

By the way, in other inns the receptionists would cry, “Kyaaaah! The Hero touched me!” in excitement.

“Oh, and your food?” Normally inns would need to mention that food didn’t come with the rooms before charging, but she hadn’t bothered since she knew that Wataru was a regular. She most certainly hadn’t just forgotten about it.

“Uhhhh, a D-Rank meal please.”

“An S-Rank meal for an S-Rank hero, riiiight?”

“...O-One C-Rank, please!”

“Thank yooou.”

By the way, in other inns (you get the point by now).

Now, it was fair to say that the inn was being outright inconsiderate to Wataru, but he actually liked that. Reason being, Wataru had been a normal Japanese person before being summoned. He just never felt right about the people in this world treating him as someone special. Not four years ago, and not now.

But this inn was different. Wataru wasn’t hiding that he was a Hero. It was just that they absolutely didn’t care. That apathy was important for him maintaining peace in his heart.

Here, he didn’t need to hide himself. Here, he could be himself, the way he used to be. Wataru had gained special powers as a Hero and learned how to kill his fellow man, but here he had nothing to fear, nothing to worry about.

Most of Goren treated him the same way, maybe due to the influence of the town chief — the person who had saddled Wataru

with his debt in the first place. He was a proud Hero beloved by all throughout the Empire, but in this town he was just treated as an especially strong adventurer. Their compassion warmed his heart.

“Oh, Wataru. That time of the month already?” Keima, the town chief, just happened to walk by. He scratched his black hair with a sleepy look in his eyes, looking ready to go straight back to sleep. Naturally, normal town chiefs would be throwing their arms in the air and celebrating the presence of a Hero in their town.

...In this world, black hair was exceedingly rare, with only Heroes and their descendants having it in most cases. Keima himself was claiming to be descended from Heroes, but Wataru thought for sure he was lying. That was how odd being apathetic towards Heroes was in this world.

“Hey, Keima. Here’s this month’s.”

“Mmm.” Wataru handed him a bag of one hundred golds. That was out of the ordinary too. We’ve been talking about huge numbers of golds here, but when converted (roughly of course) to Japanese yen, a single gold was worth about a million yen. One hundred coins would naturally be a hundred million.

At times like this, Wataru couldn’t help but think about games where gold was the base form of currency. A green herb being sold for seven million yen would be a bit much.

“By the way, Keima, do you remember how many times I’ve paid?”

“Huh...? Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten your own debt, Wataru.” Keima played it cool, but he was clearly avoiding eye contact. A friend of Wataru’s (who he met in this town) warned him about this, but to think Keima really would forget about it.

“Hahaha, nah, I’m pretty sure I’ve paid fifteen times now.”

“Nah nah nah, it couldn’t be more than seven times.”

“Why don’t you two compromise and say it’s been nine tiimes?” interjected Neruneh, offering one of the worst compromises in history.

Hold on, I’m pretty sure I started paying last year, and... Actually, never mind.

Wataru decided not to push the point. Accepting nine times meant he got an excuse to come here fourteen more times. Though to be honest, he would come regardless. Kind of funny how one hundred gold coins, a sum more than large enough for a normal citizen to support themselves for a lifetime, was small change to Keima and Wataru.

“That’s fourteen hundred golds left for you, then. Try and remember that, ’cause you forgetting just means more money for me.”

“Right. You try to remember it too, Keima.”

“I never forgot it. Hahaha.”

“I don’t know about that,” smiled Wataru.

By the way, Heroes were widely regarded as the strongest beings in a country, a firm cornerstone of any military might, but Wataru had never beaten Keima. The first time was with gambling. He lost and ended up with a debt of two thousand three hundred golds. He challenged Keima at various points after that and lost each time. He tried negotiating, arguing, and even challenging him to a mock fight, which was his specialty, but lost each time. His negotiations were dodged, his arguments countered, and honestly the fight was just a mess.

The fact he lost in a mock fight despite it being his specialty was just laughable. But to be fair, Wataru had given himself a handicap and been tricked by a one-time thing, so he would probably win if he challenged Keima to another one. Or maybe he would just flat-out lose again. At the very least, Keima wouldn’t accept a challenge he wasn’t sure he could win. He actually hated to lose, deep down.

That said, taunting him like, “What, afraid to lose?” would just net a reply like, “Consider this my loss then, it’s not a big deal to me.” Being treated like a kid was some harsh psychological damage. It didn’t feel particularly heroic.

...Also, if you try to challenge Keima with conditions if he loses, he’ll just turn you down. Trying to push any responsibility on him never ended well. So much so he would be more likely to help if you just asked him normally.

Anyway, this went on for a bit, but the conclusion is that being a Hero wasn’t a big deal in Goren. That’s why he liked it, and why he fell in love with Neruneh while he was here. Not because he was a huge masochist and his heart throbbed whenever Neruneh was mean to him.

“By the way, Neruneh, want to grab some food later?”

“Suuuure. What tiime?”

“Tonight!” She knew how to balance her carrot and stick, too.

And so, that night, Wataru and Neruneh sat at opposite sides of the table for dinner. (They were eating C-Rank lunches. Neruneh could eat for free there, but Wataru went ahead and paid for her food anyway).

“By the way, Neruneh, there’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you for a while.”

“Yees?”

“How did you end up working at this inn? Feel free not to tell me if you don’t want to talk about it.”

“Aaaah, how I ended up working heeere?” Neruneh fell silent for a bit, then smiled. Wataru smiled back.

“So, liiike.”

Oh, she's gonna answer, thought Wataru.

"Before I knew it, I was in this town, and they hired meee."

"....."

"....."

"Wha? Is that it?"

"That's iiit."

For some reason, the conversation wasn't really going anywhere. But Neruneh looked cute when she smiled, so that was fine with Wataru.

"Why did you come to this town?"

"Aaah. Why did I come to this tooown...?" Neruneh fell silent again, then smiled. Wataru smiled back in turn.

"Wataru, you know fireball magiic...?"

"Oh, uh. Yeah." It was standard practice for her to rapidly change the subject when she couldn't answer a question.

"Isn't it prettyyy? It's like, when you think of magic you kinda think of fireballs, riiight?"

"Yeah, you could pretty much say that fireballs are the most magic of all magic spells."

"Finally someone understaaands!" Neruneh gave a happy smile.

By the way, to summarize, the rest of their conversation went deep into subjects the common man wouldn't be able to understand: the dissection of modern-era magic circles, observations on manipulating natural phenomenon, the beauty of mana mixing with the atmosphere, the golden ratio of fundamental mana expenditure, and so on. They both participated with the words rolling off their tongues, though Neruneh maintained her relaxed drawl. Even Wataru could barely keep up despite having received a high quality education in a developed country, Japan. He asked when there was something he didn't understand, and she would always answer. Not that he necessarily understood all her answers.

"You really are a man of culture, Wataruuu. It's fun talking to yooou."

"Haha, I feel like I understand fireballs even more than I used to. Looks like I can bet on it getting stronger again."

"Heheh, you're talking about the relation between mental calculations and the physical phenomenon's area of effect, riiight? I knew you would be up to date on that reseaaarch. So, my thoughts on it are liiike..."

Actually, he wasn't thinking about it like that at all. He just felt like his magic got stronger whenever he learned to understand it better. But it was too late for him to correct her. In the end, he listened to Neruneh's machine gun drawl until his soup went cold.

Though, of course, Wataru didn't dislike seeing Neruneh talk with

a smile. He loved it, so eating together was a satisfying win-win for them both.

“...You know so much about everything, Neruneh. Especially magic.”

“I have a good teacheer.”

As an aside, she kept the identity of her teacher top secret, no matter how many times he asked. Though through the process of elimination he could guess it was Keima. There was nobody else in this town skilled enough in magic to teach her.

“But he always falls asleep in the middle of our talks, sooo...”

Yeah, it's gotta be Keima... but actually, I guess she talks for so long that anyone would fall asleep?

The next morning. Wataru woke up like normal. Neruneh wasn't sleeping beside him or anything. But thanks to her pressure, he had earned three nights and four days of rest. As Wataru was thinking about what to do, he heard the sound of wood hitting hard wood.

Oh, that's right, he thought while opening a window. It sounded like it was coming from behind the inn, and he knew what that meant. Niku Kuroinu and Ichika were having a training duel.

Wataru changed his clothes and joined them. It was a duel between a literal child and an adult, but bizarrely enough, it was clear the child was dominating the fight. Or it would be bizarre, if this wasn't Goren.

“Heya. Mind if I join in?”

“Mmm. That's fine.”

“Geh, ugh, then let me reeest...” Ichika slid onto the ground. They had no doubt been fighting rigorously since morning. Niku had far more stamina than could be explained by her youth.

“I was just thinking it would be nice to have a training partner I didn't need to hold back against.” Naturally, only a child from this town would say something like that to a Hero. A little girl, too.

“Wait, you were holding back against Ichika?”

“More or less.”

Wataru readied his wooden sword. He would use the opportunity to give her experience against Empire style swordplay. Some forms involved using a sword in one hand and a shield in the other, but today he was going with dual wielding. In contrast, Niku was holding a wooden knife in each hand, assassin style.

Okay, how to start this? The second Wataru started planning, Niku suddenly disappeared. She was coming from below — no, that was a feint for a right attack. Wataru slid to the left and guarded his right, whereupon his blade was hit with so much force it actually screeched like metal.

“Hm. You blocked it.”

“I am a Hero, y’know. I’d lose a lot of face if I lost to a kid.” This time, Wataru swung his sword down hard. A two handed blow from above. Naturally, she could dodge it. It was fast enough that a normal soldier would be cut in half before he could move, but Niku saw it coming and dodged with plenty of time to spare.

“You can go faster.”

“Oh, really? Let’s see.” This time, he did an upward vertical slash, about fifty percent faster than before. She dodged it, but got a little nick.

“How about now?”

“.....” Niku fell silent. Wataru knew that she was a girl of few words, and that she went completely silent when she was serious. Her expression hadn’t changed at all, but she approved of his faster speed.

“I’ll speed up a little as we go.”

“Okay.” Wataru swung his sword, Niku dodged, countered, got blocked, and so on. It was entirely like a practice match, because it was.

“Hyah!”

“Ngh, ah!” Niku’s knife broke in half.

“...I lost.”

“Whew... That was some good exercise. Like, really. Really really.” Ultimately, there weren’t many people in the Empire who could get Wataru the Hero out of breath in a mock battle. Probably a hundred at best. Of course, that hundred included the best of the best, practical superhumans such as the imperial guildmaster Misha and the commander in chief of the knight platoons, Sally. Keima was an exception, so he didn’t count. He would always win before Wataru got the chance to get out of breath.

“Okay, once more.” Niku took out a new wooden knife. She had a lot in reserve since they broke easily. But just how many was she hiding...?

“Sure, but how are you feeling? You don’t need to rest?”

“I’ve already recovered.”

She might as well be a Hero, thought Wataru. If not for the dog ears that proved she was born here, Wataru definitely would have concluded that she was a summoned Hero.

“...Do you get blisters on your hands?”

“It seems that I don’t ever get blisters.” There really was something weird about this town.

Wataru trained for hours, sweating buckets from all the exercise. He then headed for this town’s... or rather, the inn’s most famous spot. The onsen. It was polite to wear robes and such there. But naturally, men and women had separate baths. Though, the onsen inn made by a Hero in Wakoku was a mixed bath. No robes there, either.

Wataru liked Goren's onsen since it wasn't a sulfur spring and thus didn't smell bad. But someone else was already there.

"Oh, Gozou."

"That you, Wataru? Didn't know ye were here." There were plates floating in the water with food and tiny wine bottles on them. They belonged to the very dedicated dwarf Gozou. He was close friends with Wataru.

"Drinking at noon, I see. I'm jealous."

"Oh, ye want some too?"

"Absolutely."

Gozou poured him a glass. Wataru lifted up the cup and drank it down. It was a spicy wine with a sharp flavor. The heat of alcohol stuck in his nose while the scent of fruit pierced it.

"Nmm, that's some good stuff. And Gozou, it feels pretty fancy drinking like this."

"Right, right? I friggin' love drinkin' here."

"But I gotta ask, what's with the tiny wine bottles? Don't you usually chug from big ones?"

"Ah, 'bout that. Keima learned about me going on a drunk rampage here, y'see, so he banned me from drinkin' too much in the onsen. This is what I'm stuck with."

I see. Wataru could easily imagine what Gozou had done while drunk here.

"This stuff's all from the dungeon, ye know, but it's pretty friggin' good."

"It sure is. I think it's a good match for the onsen." Really, wine and grub was essential to have a true onsen experience. Keima had good taste.

"I'm a man of big beer mugs and fried food, but sippin' wine in the onsen ain't too bad either. Really, I don't get why he ain't drinking here himself."

"Haha, that's Keima for you."

"Here, Wataru, have another glass."

"Oh, thank you." Incidentally, Wataru was often given wine and beer in other cities. Rumors that Wataru the Hero loved beer spread from Goren after he started drinking there, which led to people treating him at bars wherever he went. So when it came to beer, at least, this town was like the other towns. He often listened to the complaints of his fellow drunks. Though said drunks would snap out of their stupor the second they realized who Wataru was. That didn't happen in Goren.

"Oh, outta wine. Which means I'm outta here. Yer gonna come to the bar tonight, yeah?"

"Yup. See you then." Gozou got out of the onsen after drinking the

last of the wine. Wataru got out too, feeling pleasantly drunk.

“...Aaaah.”

“Ah!”

There he stumbled upon Neruneh. She might have been disappointed in him for being the kind of failure that drank at noon.

“You’re kind of a failure, huuuuh?”

“Ngh!” She was. And she said it straight to his face. That was a little depressing.

“I-It’s fine, I’m basically on vacation while I’m here!”

“So in other words, you’re always on vacation when you’re in Goreen?”

“Yep! I may seem a little slack since I’m on vacation, but I’m usually a hard worker!”

“Do you know what that meaaans? Since I live in this town, whenever I see you, you’re alwaaays being slaaack.”

“Ngh!” Neruneh slammed him twice. She must have been working, since she passed right by him with her lazy smile. Wataru, having experienced some emotional damage, decided to cheer up by going to the church.

The Beddhist church was the only church in town, and it was pretty high level. It had fancy stained glass windows and a large fanesque magic tool attached to the ceiling, which kept the room at a comfortable temperature and humidity. There were even bookshelves that any believer could read from freely.

Not to mention, the books had a vinyl coating of some sort that stopped them from getting dirty. The coating had probably been applied with magic. That meant it was fine to fall asleep and drool on them, but that was probably just a cover. The true intent was no doubt to let villagers touch the expensive books without feeling hesitant about getting them dirty. It was probably going a bit overboard to cover all the books with such precise coating, but thanks to that, people were actually reading them.

...That would never happen in a normal town. Massive air conditioning magic tools weren’t normal either, but well, this church was the headquarters of Beddhism.

Oh? There was an avian girl. It was rare to see an avian girl with her wings out. Most hid them in their clothes to mingle with humans, but... Suddenly, Wataru realized something. Goren was a town that had just recently been built. Children themselves were rare to see here.

And beside her was Niku, who looked relaxed despite having trained to a sweaty mess with a Hero throughout the morning. They both had peaceful expressions (well, okay, Niku was expressionless) while talking to each other. Judging by her clothes, the avian girl was

probably a noble.

Wataru called out to them.

“Heeey, Kuro.”

“Hm.” Niku glanced at Wataru.

“Oh my. Who might this be, Kuro?” The avian inquired about Wataru with a posh manner of speech. She definitely was a noble.

“Just a Hero.”

“A Hero...” In other towns, nobody would say, “*Just* a Hero,” when (you get the point).

“Ah, wait, is this Wataru the Hero?!”

“...Yes?”

“Why the questioning tone, Kuro?” asked Wataru.

“Wha, I?! Kuro, are you perhaps friends with Wataru the Hero?”

Yes, this is it! This is how most kids react! thought Wataru. The avian must have only arrived here recently.

“We’ve met before.”

“Come on, can’t you be a little more positive?! We were just dueling each other, remember?”

“...He’s a nice training dummy?”

“I would like to remain human, thank you. I mean, I was thinking of us as good friends, so I dunno. Are you keeping your distance since all that stuff happened in the past...?”

“Ah! He’s Master’s servant.”

“Why did you say that full of confidence, like you were proud of it?! I don’t remember becoming anyone’s servant!”

“You two really are friends...!”

“Yeah, friends enough to joke around like this.”

The avian girl’s eyes shone as she called them friends, and Wataru looked at Niku for backup. But she just tilted her head a bit.

“Erm, I am Kuro’s... Nn, nnn, fiancée! Maïodore Tsia!”

“It’s nice to meet you. Wait, what? Tsia? Fiancée?!” The name Tsia meant that she was connected to the Archduke of Tsia. But what was all that about being Niku’s fiancée? Isn’t she a girl? Aren’t they both girls...? Questions raged in Wataru’s head.

“Yes. I am the Archduke of Tsia’s daughter. It is nice to meet you, Wataru.”

“...Are you a boy?”

“No. I am a girl.”

“...Kuro?”

“I’m also a girl.”

Wataru was at a loss. Even putting aside that one of them was a slave and the other was the Archduke’s daughter, he couldn’t understand how two girls could be engaged. Wataru was a very normal Japanese person who had sadly never been exposed to

progressive ideas.

“Is one of you lying?!”

“There exists a drug that mixes one’s sex, sir Hero. Though it requires a permit to use.”

Everything clicked for Wataru. Of course, a sex-mixing drug. That would make everything work.

“In any case, Wataru, I must ask. Did you come to town to visit Kuro?”

“Huh? No, I just like this town. Especially the inn.” Naturally, Wataru couldn’t tell a kid that he was here to pay back a crushing debt in piecemeal.

“Ah! Of course. I suppose you are staying in the grand suite, then?”

“Er, no, I-I’m staying in a normal room!”

“But why?! I cannot imagine one such as yourself staying in a normal room, Wataru... In fact, the inn should really insist that you stay in the suite.”

“Mai. This is what Master wants.”

“Aaah... I suppose there’s nothing that can be done, then.” Her opinion dramatically changed the moment Keima got involved. That made Wataru wonder just what this kid felt about Keima. But at the same time, well, he could hardly blame someone for trusting in Keima’s decision.

“You said that you were dueling Kuro this morning. As a Hero, you must be very strong. How strong does Kuro seem from your perspective?”

“Hm? Uhhh, right. I’d say only about a hundred people in the Empire are stronger than her, at best.”

“...Is that not fairly strong?”

“Well, she’s strong enough to get a hit on me if I let my guard down, so yeah.”

“That’s my Kuro for you...!” Wataru could tell that Mai really did have feelings for Niku. “By the way, what about Keima?”

“...I’ve never been able to beat Keima.”

“I can’t say I am surprised.” In many ways, beating a Hero was an almost unbelievable feat, but she didn’t seem too surprised.

“Uhhh, Maiodore? What’s your history with Keima, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Oh? Well, you see, my father gave Keima a quest to judge his strength, and...” According to Maiodore, the Archduke gave Keima a quest to investigate a criminal organization that was spreading through the slums. The quest was to see how much information he could get in a month, but Keima had made every higher up in the entire organization turn themselves in within a week. Unbelievable.

“...I could probably destroy the organization in a week, but... They turned themselves in?”

“It seems they all begged to be thrown in jail as soon as possible, having turned over a new leaf in life.”

“What the heck did Keima do...?” He glanced at Niku, who had accompanied him on his quest, but she immediately looked away.

“Ah! Niku, Mai!” There appeared a pink-haired little nun. One who just called Niku by her first name.

“Michiru.”

“Good day, Michiru. Please remember that her name is Kuro. Ku. Ro.”

“Oh, right. Sorry, Kuro.”

“Nn.”

Children were rare in Goren, and here was a third one. Wataru had met this loli before. They came to know each other on a prior visit.

“Oh, Wataru! Hi!”

“Heya, Michiru. You seem to be doing well.”

“You are friends with Wataru too, Michiru?”

“Pretty much! The air around Wataru tastes really good. I think it means he’s that thing Leona was talking about, a uuum, cherry boy?” She liked Wataru for some odd reason. He didn’t know what she meant by cherry boy, but his air tasting like cherries couldn’t be a bad thing. Better than smelling or tasting bad.

“By the way, Niku, I—”

“Kuro! It is Kuro! Goodness, Michiru, how many times will you make this mistake?”

“I meaaan, Niku is just so much easier to say! Riiight?”

“Nn.”

Given what the name meant, Wataru agreed with Maiodore. Michiru should probably stop saying it. But he didn’t know how to teach the innocent children what the word meant. And thus...

“W-Well, I’ve gotta get going.”

“Okay! See you later, Wataru!”

“Bye.”

“Have a good day, Wataru.”

Wataru fled from the three lolis. He hadn’t lost to them. It was just a tactical retreat.

That night he went to the bar with Gozou as promised, and then day came once again.

“Okaaay. Let’s hope I can find something good today.” Wataru spent his second day exploring the town’s dungeon, known as the [Cave of Greed]. It would be fair to say that exploring this dungeon was one of Wataru’s main hobbies. Most of it was basically busywork,

but that was because Keima had already dominated most of the dungeon. He was probably defeating the Dungeon Boss regularly at this point. He had told the Guild that he had put a tamed Jelly with a sign in front of the Core room to tell people to go back. That honestly impressed Wataru, since normal signs would be absorbed by the dungeon if left on their own.

Anyway, he went further and further into the dungeon. He killed an Iron Golem for fun on the way there and gave the corpse to the lucky beastkin brother and sister who had been passing by, then went further inside. He climbed down the spiral staircase and finally arrived at the storeroom area where Magic Blades could be found. Word was that Keima had advanced even further inside, but Wataru didn't feel the need to do so.

"...Alright, here we go!" He steeled his resolve and entered a small room. Inside were Magic Blades, which to Wataru were just another means of earning money. He had taken Magic Blades from the same room on his last trip, but they had naturally been replaced. Wataru danced on the inside.

The money earned from Magic Blades was small change to Wataru, but since most of his money went straight to Keima, any source of income was appreciated. He needed it to buy rice for himself and magic scrolls to gift to Neruneh.

"These are gonna earn me at least one, no, two golds! Alright, I can live like a king for a bit...!" He gathered the Magic Blades while calculating their worth in his head. Some rooms were adorned with simple iron swords, but that was fine — they just hadn't turned into Magic Blades yet. He felt like a fisherman throwing young fish back into the pond.

Sometimes, there would be chests with items connected to Japan inside. A water bottle with soy sauce inside, for instance. The dungeon was definitely connected to Japan somehow.

Wataru found ten Magic Blades after looping around the rooms. They would instantly earn him ten golds if sold to the Guild. In other words, he would earn a tenth of his monthly debt, which sounded low on paper but was actually the equivalent of ten million yen. The price would just up to two, maybe three golds a piece if he sold them at an auction, too.

Pleased, Wataru went further into the area.

"Hm? Oh, Wataru. Fancy meeting you here." He stumbled across Keima on the way.

"Keima...? I can't believe it. I don't think I've ever seen you down this deep... Are you the real thing?" One could hardly blame Wataru for getting suspicious of Keima, who was very underequipped for someone exploring the dungeon this deep.

“Seriously? I’m just on my way back from feeding the monster I tamed.”

“The monster you ta— Oh!” Suddenly, Wataru remembered about the Jelly that Keima tamed to hold the sign. “Does that mean you were all the way down the dungeon?”

“Yup. What, are you interested? I’ll take you there for a gold.”

“You’re charging money...?”

“I’d be guiding you through areas only I know about, y’know? Two golds would be a better price, to be honest.”

“You’re raising the price?!”

“I’m just following what the market says.” If market price meant doubling it in an instant, it was hardly a good market. Wataru sighed.

“Uhhh, could I pay you with Magic Blades? I just found a lot of them.”

“...Sure. Five of them.”

“Five?! When each one could be worth three golds?!” Wataru couldn’t help but raise his voice at the blatant extortion. But that just made Keima sigh and shake his head.

“You know I left those Magic Blades behind so other adventurers could get them, right? I hope you didn’t just prance in here with your Hero powers and take them all. How many did you get? Lemme hear it. What’s wrong? Don’t tell me you took all ten of them.”

“Ah...” Finally, Wataru understood. Keima was well aware of the Magic Blades here. Of course he was. He had made it to the bottom of the dungeon. And he went there on his own like he was taking a casual walk through areas that other adventurers struggled to get through at all. There was no way he didn’t have a complete grasp on all the treasure rooms in the storeroom area. He would never just miss that the rooms had Magic Blades worth a lot of money. He’d only leave them behind if he wanted to on purpose.

In other words, Keima was telling him not to steal the rewards he left for other adventurers.

“Finally understand? Good. You can take the other five back.” He spoke as if he knew that Wataru had taken all the Magic Blades.

“Er, actually, I’ll just leave them all!”

“Don’t be stupid. Who’s gonna want to challenge this dungeon if not even a Hero can bring back Magic Blades? That’s why I’m letting you take five. Not to mention it’d be pretty rough on you to come here for money and leave empty handed. Don’t be shy.”

“...Okay.” Wataru decided to leave half the Magic Blades behind each time he came here. Once again, he had lost to Keima.

Wataru followed after Keima, who was casually advancing through the dungeon as if he didn’t have to worry about traps at all. He would sometimes pause to let golems pass, and sometimes point at

Wataru's feet and warn him about a trap. They ultimately reached the Boss Room of the dungeon without having to fight a single time.

"...Keima, how did you do that?! Can you see everything in the dungeon or something?!"

"I mean, who wants to fight random mobs? I've spent enough time down here I know how to avoid them. This dungeon is like my own little playhouse." Keima spoke with such casual confidence that Wataru was at a loss for words. "I've gotta wipe out the boss on a regular basis, but yeah. Oh, and don't worry. I just beat him, nothing's gonna pop out."

"I see... What kind of boss is it?"

"Didn't I tell the Guild about it? The boss is a dragon-type golem. A Dragon Golem, if you will."

"A-A dragon-type...?" And Keima was regularly beating it like it was nothing at all. He definitely was hiding some kind of Hero power.

"What, it's not that hard of a fight. For me, anyway. I'm kinda the perfect person for beating it without much trouble. Can't tell you how, though."

"I see..." Wataru didn't even feel like asking for more details. They passed through the Boss Room and arrived at the sign in question. A jiggly yellow Jelly in the hall was holding a sign that said, "Beyond this point is the Core Room. Proceeding is prohibited by Laverio law. Signed, Town Chief Keima." Or maybe it would be better to say that the sign was just stabbed into it...

"See? This is the Jelly I tamed."

"I'm impressed you thought to do that."

"I thought they would make good pillows." What an awful reason. "By the way, the Jelly died after I sweat on it while sleeping. Got all dried up." Wataru couldn't believe he actually did it. "Oh, want to look inside?"

"Huh?"

"Inside the Core Room. The signs says you can't go inside, but doesn't that just make you curious? We've come all this way, so I figure I might as well let you take a peek."

Wataru actually was curious, so he decided to look into the Core room with Keima. In the end, it was just a normal room with a Core plopped in the middle. Keima asked if he was satisfied, and he nodded.

By the way, despite taking the time to replace five of the Magic Blades, they didn't encounter a single monster fight on the way back out of the dungeon.

Wataru spent his third and final night in the inn. His little vacation was over. That depressed him a little.

"Alriiight, time to work hard for a month!" Wataru pumped

himself up and decided to leave early. He got out of bed, got dressed, got his equipment together, and left his room. He passed by early bird adventurers and nodded at them. Until, finally...

“Oooh, leaving earlyyy?”

“Ahaha, I can’t put off work for too long.”

Neruneh was sitting behind the receptionist desk. She smiled at him.

“Come again, okaaay?”

“Yep. For sure.” Wataru resolved to return to Goren next month yet again. With that month’s one hundred gold in tow.

...But first came making up for his past self’s decision to stay for three days instead of one. Wataru left Goren quickly with his head held high.

Extra Episode: The Lolis of Goren

How The Children of Goren Look to An Adventurer

Huh? You wanna hear about the kids of Goren? That's a pretty weird thing to ask. Oh, you're an anthropologist? Maaakes sense. Don't see a lot of people like you around. Not surprised you would ask that kinda question, then. And when you asked around, people said to talk to me if you wanted to learn about the kids. Hmm.

Alright, I'll tell you what you want. Just be sure to listen to the end, alright? Alright. Have a seat.

First of all, Goren's a new town. Hasn't even been three years since it was founded. It all started when an inn was built next to a new dungeon and adventurers started gathering. But I'm guessing you know all that already.

Anyway, eighty percent of Goren's population is adventurers. Not many kids around, as you'd think. You can count the total number of them on both hands.

...Thing is, some of those few kids are actually registered as adventurers too. And one of them is close to the strongest person in the town. Sounds like a joke, but it's true. I'm being completely real here. Try asking anyone in town, "Is the strongest person in town a loli?" They'll all nod. Pretty sure she holds her own against Wataru when they spar.

Oh, and that Wataru's a Hero. Yup, the one and only Wataru the Hero. He comes here often. But you didn't come here to ask about Heroes, yeah? Lemme introduce you to the three most famous kids in Goren.

First, Niku Kuroinu. She's got dark skin, black hair, and black eyes. A dog beastkin, and a loli. She's that strong one I was just telling you about. She was also the town's first resident. She apparently lived around here before the town was ever made. There's a lot strange about her, like how she's a B-Rank adventurer despite being a slave — you won't find another one of those in all of the Empire, I'd bet. That should make her a noble, but she's passing herself off as a D-Rank and the town chief's slave. What's going on there? Nobody knows.

Of course, her first name's got a pretty lewd connotation, so everyone just calls her by her last name, Kuro. (If you want to know just how lewd the name Niku is, imagine something even lewder than being named "Boobs" or "Testicles.")

Seems like she's getting self-conscious about her height and weight lately. Despite eating a ton of meat at a time where she should be growing, she doesn't get taller or bigger at all. Maybe she's been cursed or something?

Second one's Michiru. She's a pink-haired nun, and a loli. She's an apprentice that lives in the town's Beddhist church. She and the other nuns, including the chief nun Suilla, started living in the church out of nowhere not long after it was built.

But nobody found that particularly suspicious. They appeared right as a black-haired red-eyed nun named Leona left, but there was nothing odd about that at all. Nobody in town thinks that's weird, and I sure don't either. That's just the kinda thing that happens in new towns. It happens all the time. It definitely happens all the time. You know what I mean?

She's oddly alluring despite her youth, and her revealing nun outfit looks great on her. Yeah, Beddhist nun outfits show a lot of skin. The pope's into that. Good taste, pope. And by the way, lemme say now that the pope and the town chief — Kuro's master — are the same person. Is he a huge lolicon? I'm not going to answer that question, but we both know the answer.

By the way, lots of adventurers have mentioned seeing Michiru playing around with huge, lewd wood carvings. She had probably messed up when making normal dolls in the church. Or maybe those adventurers are just delusional.

The third and last one's Maiodore Tsia. She's the beloved daughter of our local Archduke, a cute avian girl with long blue hair, and a loli. She moved here recently. Most people just call her Mai. You might think it's rude not to call her by her full name, but hey. That's what she wants, and I dunno if it would be smart to reject a noble's wishes. It's the lesser of two evils and that's fine with me. Can you think of a better solution? No? Same here.

Anyway, about Mai. She's engaged to Kuro. It's not too rare for two lolis to be engaged in noble society. You need a permit to use it, but there's a drug that can change your sex if need be. The main question is why a noble is engaged to a slave, but nobody knows the answer to that.

By the way, she ended up getting a guild card 'cause she admires Kuro so much. Countless adventurers here have had their hearts melt after she asked them for advice. I'm one of them.

The fourth... huh? I only mentioned three of them? Ah, my bad. The fourth one's kind of a mystery. She's a blonde-haired blue-eyed loli. She's sometimes seen around the inn, and people think she's a god that lives around here. Or maybe Keima's hidden daughter. Either way, nobody knows her name. We just call her our Lucky Star. She's

usually seen running around, and just looking at her makes you happy. Some people confessed to the girl they like after seeing her and got a date.

But well, she's kind of out of the ordinary. Not even sure if she should count as one of us townsfolk.

Oh, speaking of kids, I forgot to talk about the Silkies. Sorry for dragging this on so long.

They're three little girls who call themselves the Silkies: Hanna, Nicole, and Pio. I didn't count them before since they're pretty close to adulthood, but you can usually find them running around all excited and stuff. Everywhere they pass by ends up completely clean. Just what you'd expect from a trio calling themselves the Silkies. I'm sure a real Silky would be just as cute and lovable as them.

And that's that. All the most famous kids in Goren. Did that help you out?

Hm? I forgot to introduce a really important kid? Good eye! There's a baby born here in Goren. We townsfolk tried weathering the winter here, and you could say she was our reward. Her name's Sleepo. She was given the name of a saint from the Beddhist bible, and you could say she's symbolic for this whole town. A real angel.

And yep, she's my kid! I could talk about her all night, and that's why I left her for last. Now that everyone else is out of the way, I can — hey wait sit back down I'm not done yet. Alright? First of all, her nose looks a lot like mine, so in the future she's gonna (he raved about his kid until morning).

Loli Trio's Perspective

"Yes! I finally have my own guild card! Now I can go in the dungeon with you two!"

"Congratulations, Michiru."

"Mmm."

Michiru held up her G-Rank guild card while squealing with excitement. Maiodore (who had gotten her card days before) and Niku (who had long ago gotten her B-Rank card) celebrated her success.

"I wanted one of these a long time, right? But Suilla kept saying it was too early for me."

"Oh, she finally changed her mind?"

"I told her the town chief said I could and that was that!"

"...Um, does Keima know that?"

"Of course! I don't lie." Hearing that was a relief for Maiodore.

"What did you say to him?" asked Niku.

"Oh? You wanna know? You're dying to know my super technique, Niku? Eheheh, I'll tell you since we're such good friends!"

The truth is, I said, ‘Suilla said I could make a guild card, but what do you think?’ And that was it! He said okay! Amazing, right? Are you impressed, Niku?!”

“Hm... Wow. That was smart, Michiru.”

“Right?! It took some prep, but in the end I didn’t lie!”

But you would have lied if one of them said no, thought Maiodore while rubbing her temples. But in the end, only Michiru would get in trouble if they found out, and now that she had her card there was no going back.

“So, I wanna get to C-Rank as soon as possible! Let’s work together! The faster the better!” Michiru wanted to get to C-Rank quickly, but Maiodore knew well that it wasn’t that easy. Normal adventurers had to work years and years before they were finally given their C-Rank. But since she also knew someone who managed to get B-Rank in just a year, it was hard for her to bring that up.

“...Mmm. Doing consistent good work for long periods of time is very important for adventurers. I don’t believe it will be that easy to rank up.”

“You got to F-Rank the day after you got your card, didn’t you? It’ll be fine, totally fine!”

“That only works for the lower ranks! Not to mention, I’m a bad example since my family name carries weight and I participated in an important quest with the town chief. You should temper your expectations, Michiru.”

“Tch. You’re so hardheaded, Mai. But that’s fine! I’ll be F-Rank in no time! The super ultra legend of Michiru’s worldwide conquest begins wight now! I mean right now!” Her tongue slipped. She focused so much on saying her super ultra legend of whatever that she stumbled.

“Niku, Mai! Let’s hurry and get our first quest together! I think a Dragon extermination quest would be perfect!”

“Start lower! Be like everyone else and start with herb gathering! You would not be able to beat a legendary monster like a dragon in a fight! And her name is Kuro! Ku! Ro! Please, Kuro, you say something to her too!”

“I don’t mind. I like it, actually.”

“Aah, geez...!”

Michiru walked off, so Maiodore and Niku followed.

“Nn. That reminds me. I’m in the town chief’s party. Does that mean we can’t make our own party?”

“Ah! I forgot you were in his party, Niku!”

“That won’t be a problem, we can form a temporary party. And once again, it’s Kuro... Anyway. Did you two not receive this explanation when you were given your cards?” They no doubt had,

but they either forgot or weren't listening. Niku and Michiru both tilted their heads in a cute way.

"...Anyway, we can form a party."

"Okay."

"Yay! Now we can work on our power leveling!"

"Power leveling? What is that?"

"Leona told me about it! Power leveling is when you get the help of strong people to raise your level fast!"

"...Level? Did she mean guild rank? Well, in any case, it is normal to be taught by your elders."

The Leona that Michiru frequently brought up was a nun who used to work at the Beddhist church. She left just as Michiru arrived, but... They must have known each other in the past, as fellow Beddhist nuns. There was nothing odd whatsoever that they arrived at the church just as Leona left.

"In any case, shall we form a party and search for a quest we can all do together?"

"Yeeees!"

"Okay."

After hearing their replies, Maiodore opened the door to the Adventurer's Guild. The guild in Goren was more accurately called a branch office of the guild in Tsia. There was one woman who worked there seemingly every day — Cilia. She was the Tsia guildmaster's granddaughter and the chief of the branch office.

"Oh, welcome. What brings you three here today?"

"We would like to do a quest. We will form a temporary party, if you would be so kind as to prepare the paperwork."

"Also, make the quest something worth my time, as the great Michiru!"

"Nn."

"Oh my. What a cute little party. Understood, I will assist you as best I can. But there don't seem to be any quests I would recommend for you today..." As one would expect from a town of adventurers, not many quests were left undone for long. This late in the day there were only the forever ongoing quests like goblin extermination and Iron Golem hunting. They could enter the dungeon since Niku was B-Rank, but...

"Hmmm... Maiodore, Michiru, can either of you kill goblins?"

"I could, if I were to use my magic. What about you, Michiru?"

"I could even beat a dragon! Okay, that's not true. Ummm, I don't really like goblins... They taste nasty." She had apparently been forced to eat goblins to survive while traveling.

"Well, regardless, it wouldn't be a good quest for children. Though Kuro is an obvious exception."

“Mm.” Since Niku was well known as the strongest fighter in the town, she could be trusted to complete quests that involved combat. Cilia fell into thought.

“Oh, I know. I will post an herb gathering quest myself.”

“Sounds wonderful.”

“Awwwww, I wanna beat up monsteers!”

Aren't nuns supposed to be gentle and kind? thought Maiodore. But in reality, many religious figures and members of the clergy were in fact fighters. Famous examples were Haku Laverio the Ivory Goddess and Alca the High Priestess. Not to mention that the Beddhist pope himself was an active adventurer.

“Aaahhh... Michiru. Listen well,” began Cilia. “The town is in dire need of medicinal herbs right now. We need you to gather herbs to save the town from certain destruction. Only a heroic nun such as yourself can save us, Michiru.”

“Leave it to me! Nuns are all about helping people!” Michiru believed Cilia’s lies without a moment of hesitation. And thus, their party could safely begin with a simple herb gathering quest.

“Oh, and by the way. What will the name of your party be? It is only a temporary one, but I believe a name would be nice.”

“Right! Okay, just call us ‘The Great Michiru and Her Band of Buddies!’”

“Wha?”

“Being in charge sounds annoying, so I’ll let you be leader, Mai!”

“Whaaat?”

“Okay, let’s go!” Michiru enthusiastically left the guild. Not even in the orphanage Mai supported were there any kids as shameless as her.

“...Oh, before you go, Maiodore. Here is the kind of herb I would like you to gather. The fruit that grows off the herbs are good for medicine. Please bring back a bottle’s worth or more.”

“...Understood.” Speaking of which, Michiru hadn’t even checked to see what herb they should be gathering. A true failure of an adventurer.

“Tralalalaaa.” They went outside the town and into a forest. On the way there Michiru tried barging into the dungeon, but Niku stopped and told her the herbs were in the forest, not the dungeon.

“Michiru, please do not stray too far. I would not want you getting lost.”

“It’s fine, Mai! My nose is actually pretty good! Sniff sniff...”

What relation is there to having a good nose and getting lost? wondered Mai.

“Mai. If she gets lost here, I can find her without issue.”

“You’re so reliable, Kuro... I can always count on you.”

“Yes. I have a good nose.”

Why... Why the noses... questioned Mai, her head tilted in confusion.

“Oh! Look, Mai! Isn’t that it?! Over there!”

“Oh?” Mai looked where Michiru pointed and saw a bunch of black fruit.

“Those are black.”

“But they have a bunch of red seed things on the inside. I’ve seen Leona eat them before.” Regardless, they were very different from the red fruit that the herbs they wanted grew on.

“Oh! Look, Mai! Isn’t that it?! Over there!”

“Oh?” Mai looked where Michiru pointed and saw a bunch of yellow fruit hanging off a tree.

“Those taste sour, but they’re really good! I had one of them when running away from the town chief.”

“Why were you running from the town chief...?” Regardless, they were not the herbs they wanted. And they were looking for fruit growing off grass, not trees.

“Oh! Look, Mai! Those are definitely what we’re looking for!”

“Again?” Mai looked where Michiru pointed and saw a bunch of red fruit. “Oh, you actually found them this time. Good job, Michiru.”

“Heheh! This kinda stuff is cake to me!” They had finally found the herbs they were looking for. They picked off the fruit parts and put them into bottles. The fruit they found was enough to fill up the bottle.

“That is all we need for the quest. Shall we return?”

“Wait, Mai! My nose tells me there’s treasure here.” Michiru sniffed the air.

“Is your nose that powerful, Michiru?”

“Yes! Leona complimented me for it a lot! ‘Your nose is so small and cute, Michiru,’ she said!” She seemed to have complimented how her nose looked, but not how it functioned.

“You truly love Leona, don’t you?”

“Yes! She’s amazing!”

“How so?”

“Mmm...” Michiru closed her eyes and fell into thought, searching her memories for past feats Leona had accomplished. “Right! You know how magic chants are made from magic language? And how there are key words shared between them.”

“Yes, of course.”

“Well, to Heroes from another world who know some weird language, the chants all look like normal words!”

“Oh?”

“That’s all thanks to Leona! She just thought it would be funny, or

something!”

“...And?”

“That’s it! Isn’t it amazing? Leona messes with language and stuff!”

If that were true, Leona would no doubt have unfathomably enormous power, thought Maiodore.

“Does that mean Wataru understands them...?” asked Niku, despite having not really participated in the conversation much.

“I would imagine so, given that he is a Hero from another world. Though I’m not sure if he knows that strange language Michiru was talking about.”

“So basically, Wataru’s benefiting from Leona’s work too! That means Leona is more amazing than a Hero. Amazing, right? Right!” Maiodore wasn’t really following Michiru’s logic, but surely it would be a bit much to claim she was more amazing than a Hero.

“I find it hard to believe she is more amazing than Wataru... What do you think, Kuro?”

“...I hate to say it, but that thing was definitely stronger than Wataru. By a lot.”

“O-Oh, I see.” Mai felt frustration from Niku, which wasn’t common. Especially given that she called Leona ‘that thing.’ Had Niku met Leona before...?

Not even Maiodore, the daughter of the Archduke, had heard rumors of a strong individual known as Leona. But well, she knew she was a child and that children didn’t know far more than they did know. There were no doubt many people in the world who hid the extent of their true strength. Like Keima, for instance.

“Ah. Goblins,” whispered Niku out of nowhere. Maiodore looked up and saw through the trees some goblins in the distance.

“Ooooh! Is it time for me to show what I’ve got?! Alright! Come and get me, goblins! My charms are gonna, like, uh, totally destroy you!”

“They’ll find us if yo— Ah.” Michiru’s yells had alerted the goblins. They were looking at them.

We’re going to be attacked... Maiodore felt her wings shrink with fear. But then, she remembered that Niku was with them. She was casually readying her weapons, disappointed to have lost the opportunity for a surprise attack but not really caring.

“Michiru, go ahead, if you want.”

“H-Hold on a second, lemme get my weapon! Ah! I forgot to bring a weapon! I haven’t even bought one yet!”

“You didn’t forget to bring it, you forgot to get one...” murmured Maiodore, exasperated.

“Can you fist fight?”

“Oooh! I totally can... not! I cannot! No way! They stink so bad! They’re way worse than the ones in the dungeon! Mai can have them.” It was true that an awful scent was wafting off the wild goblins, unlike dungeon goblins. But Michiru probably wouldn’t be able to fist fight with a goblin even if they didn’t stink.

“Aaah, I wish they were dragons instead of goblins. I could make dragons all lovey dovey with my charms!”

“...Well, we shall cover for you, Michiru. Take the front, Kuro. I will finish them off with magic!”

“Mm,” grunted Niku while slicing off the heads of two of the goblins without a moment’s hesitation. She then slipped behind the final goblin, grabbed its neck in one hand, and lifted it into the air. Niku was small, but she could lift up a goblin with no issue.

“Now. While I’m holding it.” The goblin flailed while struggling for air. It was like a fish out of water, flopping on a cutting board.

She didn’t need me at all, thought Maiodore, but she cheered herself up remembering that this was just the difference that experience made.

“I feel a bit sorry for the goblin now, but... ■■■■■■■■, ■■ — {Fireball}.” A fireball the size of a head appeared. But Mai didn’t focus enough, so the fireball went flying in another direction... which reminded her that she had been told not to use fire magic in forests since it could start a forest fire.

“Ah!”

“Hyah.” Niku threw the goblin at the racing fireball. It was a direct hit, and the goblin went up in flames. The corpse fell on an open space without any trees or grass. The fire disappeared without growing into anything more.

“Very good aim, Mai.”

“That’s what I should be saying to you, but... Th-Thank you.”

“H-Hmph! How was that?! Now you know not to mess with me!” Michiru stomped on the goblin corpse. Despite having done nothing, she was the most smug of them all.

“Okay, Mai! Let’s pee on him!”

“What?! Wh-Why would we ever do that? Should a nun not purify and bury the corpse?”

“Meh, it’s just a goblin. You know goblins are normally chopped up into fertilizer, right? But more importantly! If you see a fire and don’t pee before going to bed, you’ll end up peeing yourself at night! Leona told me!”

“Then why not relieve yourself after returning home?!” *She must have misheard Leona*, thought Mai while stopping Michiru from peeing.

“Oh. Did you know that girl pee is like, a reward? Leona told me that too.”

“Even so!” Maiodore felt like she now understood why Niku called Leona “that thing.”

After that, they safely returned to the guild and gave Cilia the herbs, not to mention goblin ears.

“Thank you for gathering these fruit, Michiru.”

“Eheheheeh. This is my true power!” Michiru actually had been the one to first find the fruit, so Mai didn’t say anything.

“You even exterminated some goblins. You have a bright future ahead of you, I think.”

“Eheheh! Well, I am going to be an S-Rank adventurer when I grow up, so this is nothing!”

Okay, that was a bit too much for Mai not to say anything.

“Michiru? Truly strong adventurers do not brag about their strength. Think about the town chief.”

“Oh! That’s right, Leona always hid her power to avoid dealing with annoying people... Okay! I’ll hide my true power from now on, Mai! But I’ll actually be an S-Rank adventurer! So cool!”

Was that cool? Maiodore didn’t really have a frame of reference for what made something cool or not.

“Michiru. Is that truly ‘cool,’ as you say?”

“Um, duh? Am I right, Niku?” She guided the conversation to Niku.

“...I do think it’s cool. Like, being a B-Rank adventurer, but pretending to be a D-Rank.” Maiodore noticed that she was talking about Keima. It was pretty obvious. And well, it made sense.

“You know what’s up, Niku! Okay! Anyway, one rank up, please!”

“I’m sorry, but it’s too early for that, Michiru. You’ll have to keep up the good work first.”

“Gaah! Fine, okay! I’m hiding my true power, so I’ll take things the long way!”

“More importantly, Michiru. Suilla is, ah...”

“Huh? What about Suilla? D-Does she need these herbs or something?!” Suddenly, two hands grabbed onto Michiru’s shoulders from behind. She turned her head and saw Suilla smiling at her.



“Oh! Suilla! Are you okay? Does your chest hurt?!”

“Michiru? I appreciate that you’re worried about me. But, well.” Her hands tightened.

“...S-S-Suilla? Um, o-ow, that hurts!”

“Michiru. You said that the town chief permitted you to become an adventurer... but in truth, you lied to him and said that I gave you permission first, didn’t you?” It seemed that Michiru’s trick had been discovered.

Beautiful women who get mad with a smile are terrifying, realized Maïdore.

“I-I-I didn’t lie! In the end, everything I said was true!”

“But it was a lie when you spoke to the town chief.” It was impossible to argue with Suilla’s point, for it was objectively true. “It is time for you to be punished, Michiru. Oh, and Kuro? Mai? Thank you for spending time with Michiru again. It is truly appreciated. Now, if you’ll excuse us.”

“Eeeeeek!”

And so, Michiru was dragged away. She would probably be spanked so hard she would struggle to sit with all the swelling.

“...What would you like to do now, Kuro?”

“It’s about time for me to work.”

“Oh, I suppose this is goodbye for today, then.”

And so the first quest of the temporary party “The Great Michiru and Her Band of Buddies” ended. The next day, Cilia used the “herbs” to bake cookies for the group. They were very delicious, with a nice, unique flavor. Though Michiru’s share got confiscated.

Afterword

Volume 8! Woohoooo, volume 8! Thank you for reading everyone, and surprise, LDM is getting adapted into a manga! This is almost like a dream to me. Though I won't pinch my cheeks cause that would probably hurt.

Anyway, the first chapter of the manga should be put online right as this volume comes out. I sure hope my editor isn't lying to me or anything. Guess this means an anime adaptation is around the corne— Yeah, no, that's still a distant dream. Overlap has a lot of other series that would be, uh, more likely to be animated, so to speak. I know that. Other series have beginnings that are a little more family friendly. Like Arifureta. Congratulations.

Anyway, this volume was all about Ichika. She finally got on the cover. And as is commonplace by now, a lot of things happened in this volume that didn't in the web novel. Ichika's former party members Isam and Mimiko showing up, for instance. The web novel had the foreshadowing, but only here is it followed up on.

I just took all this new plot and stuffed it into the rookie hunter arc. About ninety-five percent of this volume is original stuff. At this point the volumes might as well be completely original. The page count ended up a little lower than usual because of that, so I filled things out with some extra long extra episodes.

As an aside, I believe Neruneh and Wataru first got close in a short story I wrote for an online questionnaire about Volume 4. I think you might be able to enjoy their relationship in Extra Episode 1 if you read that.

Oh, and for this afterword I get six pages. That's a lot. I put in a crossword puzzle when I had a four page one before, but... Okay. I think I'll write a "parallel world"-type short story. Like that one isekai school parody out there. A school life story... Four more pages... I can do this! It won't be a problem, I just gotta pack it in tight. That might mess with the pacing, but hey, this is an afterword. Anything goes.

And so, please enjoy.

The Lazy Dungeon Master Just Wants To Sleep In Class

Ding, dooong, ding, dooong. The end of school bell rang out.
"Guh... Oh, what? Class is over?"

“Seriously, Keima? I can’t believe you were sleeping in class again!”

My name was Keima Masuda. I was a spry and healthy sixteen-year-old in my second year of high school.

In front of me stood Rokuko. She had blonde hair and blue eyes, just like your standard anime heroine. We both went to Meikyuu High School and were in the Dungeoneering department.

I met her on the first day of school when the teacher asked everyone to make groups. She was left on her own by everyone else, and I was late due to oversleeping, so we formed a pair together. Ever since then she’s basically been my partner in all sorts of things.

“Sheesh, my big sis Haku gave an amazing lesson on conquering dungeons together. You’re really only hurting yourself by sleeping through class, Keima. Think of all the money you paid to be here.”

“Let’s not talk about money, it hurts too much... But man, Ms. Haku really does look good in black stockings. I hope I get to see her feet in them one day.” Ms. Haku was Rokuko’s older sister and had an intelligent, sharp aura that made everyone think she was a teacher. Which was good, since she was in fact a teacher. The teaching whip she carried was a perfect fit for her image. Just like her tight skirt and black stockings were.

By the way, Ms. Haku hated my guts since she “could’ve been Rokuko’s partner if I hadn’t gone to class.” What a mean thing to tell a student. But given that Haku generally focused her strategies around using numbers to win through brute force, she was indeed a good match for Rokuko’s dungeon.

“Hahaha! Sleeping in class again, Keima? Your boldness never ceases to inspire!” Up walked Core 219, another of my classmates. Everyone called her the Prince. She was a girl, but she dressed in male clothing and was the star of the theater club.

“Heya, Prince. Looking as sharp as ever.”

“Hahaha. By the way, Keima. You should visit the theater club sometime soon. I would like to see that beautiful form of yours once more.”

“Not a chance. I’m never cross dressing again.”

“Is that so? But you look so wonderful in a dress.”

“Bruh, back up. Back the heck up. I don’t want your weird fetishes infecting me.”

“Oh, forgive me, my little Mand. I did not intend to scorn you, my sweet little princess,” said Core 219 while stroking the small flower that had popped out of her pocket. Or rather, not a flower, but a tiny person. A small girl with a white flower growing on her green hair. She was a mandragora, and another of my classmates. She paired up with Core 219 a lot. They were kind of like me and Rokuko.

“Keima, you’re the pervert. You said you wanted to put me in a pot and watch me grow on a table. You also said you wanted to eat ramen while using my toes as chopsticks.”

“That’s slander. That never happened and I protest your lying. Do you have a single fact to back that up?”

“You said it while sleeping.”

“I’m sorry. I was probably just allured by the temptation of your tiny feet.” We continued talking and ultimately I agreed to buy her some ramen later.

“In any case, you may drop by whenever you like, Keima.”

“I’ll forgive you once you buy me some ramen. But not before then. Lateer.”

Sheesh, that’s more damage to the wallet. I’m gonna have to save up for a bit...

“That’s super gross, Keima. Who wants to use toes as chopsticks?”

“I mean, Mand is the perfect size for that, so... How can I help what happens in my dreams?”

Rokuko and I chatted for a bit, then a small girl came walking into the classroom. It was Niku. My little sister and junior in school. The fact that we slept together (she snuck into my bed every night and I liked using her as a dakimakura) can be a secret between you and me.

“K-K-Keima. Want to, go home together?”

“Hm? You don’t need to help out any of the sports club today?”

“Um, I already ran in the gym, so... I think that’s enough.”

By the way, Niku had an extreme talent for all things sports. So much so it was hard to believe she was my little sister. She was strong enough to fight the student council president Wataru (a first-year in the Hero department) and the delinquent queen of the school Redra (a literal dragon) and survive... *Wait, is it just me, or are there a ton of dangerous as heck people in this school? Or am I just weak?*

“You can’t go yet, Keima. You promised to have a practice Dungeon Battle with me today, remember?”

“Oh yeah, I did... Sorry, Niku. Go on home without me.”

“I can... help you...”

“We asked Ms. Leona to watch over us in case something happens, though. Are you gonna be okay?” Niku was a strong little girl, but she found it difficult to be around Ms. Leona, our health teacher. It was true that Leona always seemed to be plotting one thing or another.

“...I don’t like her, but... If it’s for your sake, K-Keima, I’ll...”

“Hmph. Fine, you can come with us, Niku,” said Rokuko before marching off to the gym. Niku and I followed after her.

The gym had a court for basketball and so on, but it also had a battlefield for Dungeoneering practice. It was possible to hold countless Dungeon Battles here without issue. And there we found Ms.

Leona waiting for us.

“My my, you two sure took a long time.”

“Sorry. We ended up late because of Keima. Ummm... Thank you for helping us practice today.”

“Ahaha. It’s fine. I’ll lose my skills if I don’t practice every now and again, anyway.” Ms. Leona was our health teacher, but she was also a Dungeoneering department graduate. She also ran a fairly infamous Succubus Dungeon. It was basically a straight upgrade on the [Cave of Greed] dungeon I made with Rokuko, so she was a perfect person to practice with.

Not to mention, she had crazy skills that put her on top of the Hero department too. To be honest, she was so strong that not even our usual partner Aidy could hold a candle to her. This would mostly be a challenge to see how long we could survive against her onslaught... But, well. Might as well try and give her as much hell as possible.

“Ready to go, Rokuko?” I asked, but received no answer. Because this story is over. No, it won’t continue. Thanks for reading.

Supana Onikage

Bonus Short Stories

Little Michiru Wants To Be An Adventurer

Suilla and Michiru were holding a family meeting in the church. The topic of discussion was Michiru's desire to be an adventurer.

"Listen well, Michiru. You say you want to be an adventurer, but it's a life filled with hardships. No child should suffer what adventurers suffer through."

"Sister! I have a question!"

"Yes, Michiru?"

"Niku is a kid too, but she's the strongest adventurer in town!"

"She's an exception."

Michiru pursed her lips in a pout.

"...And furthermore," continued Suilla, "We are Succubi. You would run the risk of exposing your identity by becoming an adventurer."

"Sister! I have a question!"

"Yes, Michiru?"

"You and the others are registered as adventurers so you can go in the dungeon, right?"

"Yes, but that was at the town chief's instructions."

Michiru pursed her lips in a pout again. Thus, the family meeting ended with Michiru still unsatisfied.

"And that's why she won't let me be an adventurer. What do you think I should do, Rei?" Michiru was talking to Rei in the church. Since Rei often worked there due to her status as High Priestess of Beddharma, she was fairly close with Michiru and the other Succubi.

"...If she's turning you down because you're a child, why not become an adult?"

"An adult... What do I need to do to be an adult?" Despite their power within dreams, it was enormously difficult for a Succubus to change their form in the physical world. Michiru pressed up to Rei, seeking a method to turn into an adult.

"I can see your chest. Maybe an adult would be embarrassed about that and try to hide it."

"I-I'm showing it on purpose! It's called seduction!"

"Well, I suppose that's normal for a Succubus, but I think you just didn't notice it." An exposed chest scored big points with lolicons, for

sure, but only an adult would really think about it in that frame of mind. "For now, why not try to stop being picky with food, and avoid sweet things for a bit?"

"...I don't wanna eat any goblins."

"Nobody said you had to. I'm thinking more like onions and tomatoes."

"But neither of those are rod shaped! I don't wanna eat them!"

But you would if they were rod shaped? thought Rei as she contemplated what kinds of food a Succubus might like. "What about... ball-shaped food, then?"

"Mmm, maybe if they're about this small... Mini tomatoes could work."

Mini tomatoes are fine...? Why does size matter? thought Rei, lowering her eyes. It surely came down to personal preference. Suilla and the other adult Succubi ate normal onions without issue, after all.

"You know, I really think being an adult's just about having big boobs!"

"I see. Suilla and the others certainly are buxom."

"I hear drinking milk makes them bigger! Please breastfeed me."

"Mine don't produce milk!"

Michiru clicked her tongue. "They're this big and they don't make any milk? Squeeze squeeze."

"Please do not squeeze them without asking, Michiru."

"Leona said they get bigger if you squeeze them! Help me out and let me squeeze them!"

"I believe she meant to squeeze your own, not others... nnn, hey! Y-You're getting squeezing too tight! Too much!"

"Gehehe, these are nice, sooo niceeee."

Rei tried to knock Michiru back, but she had zero attack power. She was completely helpless and could do nothing as a child thoroughly groped her chest. Michiru only quit after she was satisfied.

"...Give those to me!"

"H-Haah, haaah... Th-That's not even possible...!"

"Tchhh." Michiru was tiny, but she was still a Succubus. Rei was already exhausted from dealing with her, in more ways than one. "I'll go get the town chief to squeeze mine, then!"

"...There's nothing there for him to squeeze."

"Failed already! Grrr..."

Why is she growling? Rei readjusted her clothes which Michiru had disheveled.

"Well, anyway. I know what I have to do! I need to become an adult lady!"

"...Good luck. I'm not helping."

"By the way, there's something I want you to help me with!"

I just said I wasn't helping, thought Rei with a sigh. "And what might that be?"

"Tell me about all your adult experiences! Don't worry, your secrets will be safe with me!"

...Adult experiences. Rei averted her gaze.

"...Rei?"

"W-Well, I haven't had any adult experiences myself, so..." It was easy to forget, but Rei was a dungeon monster. She was summoned about a year ago at the earliest. Since dungeon monsters were born from DP, she might actually have had less life experience than Michiru overall.

"....."

"Er, I mean. I was an adult from the day I was born, so...?"

"Okay! I'll try to think of something else! I don't need to be an adult to be an adventurer! Bye!" Michiru ran off, waving good bye to Rei.

"...This feels kinda frustrating!" Rei, left on her own, decided to try and live a little more.

Neruneh's Magic Training

"Okaaay, Masteeer, have at iiiit."

"Roger."

Neruneh took the Recorder Golem from Keima after he recorded a magical chant on it. To learn a spell without a scroll, you had to beat the proper incantation into your head and memorize the exact effects of the spell. Neruneh could eventually grow from an Apprentice Witch to a full on Witch by learning enough magic. The fastest route to becoming a Witch would be learning a large number of spells, but Neruneh was being trained by Keima, and he specialized in thoroughly mastering a small set of particular spells. Neruneh had determined that she would become a stronger Witch one day by following in his footsteps. A true Witch was a master of magic, not a jack of all trades.

The chant she was being taught was {Fireball}, but this was unlike the normal {Fireball} chant, this one would send out fifteen balls of fire at once. She had seen Keima doing that very thing herself.

"Heheheeeh. I bet a normal Apprentice Wiiiitch would never think that magic is thiiiiis flexible."

"Well, most spellcasters actually can't change spells like this, so they wouldn't really be wrong." Only those who knew the language of magic like Keima could modify spell incantations at will. Keima could modify spells without even needing to chant anything at all. That was something that one learning magic would immediately declare

impossible. But in any case, the incantation was recorded on the golem.

“Can I try listening to iiit?”

“Do whatever you want, I recorded it for you. Just, uh, don’t let any humans outside our circle catch you.”

“Yaaay!” With Keima’s permission, she immediately held up the Recorder Golem to her ear and played the recording.

“■■■■■■■■■■, ■■■■■■ — {Fireball}.”

“Aaaah... So goooood! There are words I’ve never ever heard before this chaaaant!”

The magic language. Despite being called a language, it hardly seemed to be consistent or structured at all. Every chant sounded like white noise containing no words whatsoever. When comparing a chant Kemia modified to the original, it was almost impossible to tell what was the same and what was different. No matter how many chants she listened to, it all sounded the same. But Keima assured her he heard it as words, so there was likely a consistent structure that Neruneh and other magical scientists just couldn’t fathom. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be able to modify the spells.

“Haaah, haaah... It’s nothing like the fourteen balls of fire chaaaant... It’s actually more like the four balls of fire chant, kindaaa...? This just gave me more questiooons...”

“I’m just changing the number in the middle of it. Are they really that different?”

“Uh-huuuuuh.” Neruneh hit the play button again, listening to the recorded incantation repeatedly. She was experiencing pure bliss over learning more about magic. Which compelled Keima to ask a question.

“By the way, Neruneh, how good are you at magic?”

“Whaaat?” The question confused her. Naturally, she had memorized each of the spells Keima had taught her up until that point. She could use them all, and it was hard to believe Keima didn’t know that.

“I mean, like, as an Apprentice Witch. How are you compared to an average Apprentice Witch? Do you have more mana, or...?”

“Aaah... I don’t really know what the average Apprentice Witch is liiike... But weell, I’m probably up theeere.” Neruneh had ceased to be normal when she began taking lessons from Keima, who was not normal himself. After all, a normal Apprentice Witch couldn’t cast fourteen fireballs at once. She was being paid DP for her work and using it to buy as many mana potions as she wanted, which was boosting her total mana up at a rapid pace. Being able to listen to as many chants as she wanted to through the Recorder Golems helped too.

She wasn’t just knowledge about spells, though. She had a breadth

of knowledge related to magic circles as well, thanks to the research materials brought to her by Wataru and the local blacksmith Kantara. Considering all the spells she knew — and not just variations of one spell, either — it would probably be safe to say that she was already strong enough to call herself a Witch.

“Or at least, I think sooo.”

“I see. Maybe I should buy some more magic skill scrolls for you, then.”

“Aaah... About thaaat. According to the newest magical research Wataru’s told me about, magic is actually stronger when you work hard and learn it yourself instead of using a scroool.”

“Huh? Well, yeah, I guess that makes sense.” *Why wouldn’t homemade food taste better than frozen food*, thought Keima with a shrug.

“It seems like memorizing it yourself deepens your understanding of the speeell. And that’s probably why you’re so strong too, Masteeer. Soooo, I want to keep learning spells from youuu, I thiiink.”

Keima nodded and thought about magic. “Alright, guess I’ll teach you {Summon Gargoyle} next. A spell that summons ten Gargoyles at once should be pretty useful. They’ll be a nice wall if it comes to that.”

“I probably don’t have enough mana for thaaat.”

In any case, one spell at a time. Neruneh went ahead and learned the fifteen fireball spell first.

Succubus Keima’s Little Sister Photo Shoot

It all happened when he went to Core 219 to ask for help.

“Say ‘Please, big brother’ in that beautiful form of yours. As cute as possible, if you will.” Keima wanted to turn her down. He wanted to just turn around and walk out on the spot. But this was one favor that he absolutely needed, no matter what. With a bitter grimace, Keima nodded.

And so, a photo session began under Core 219’s direction. Keima begrudgingly let his ring Succubus Kosaki possess him again, turning into a femboy with clothes that showed a lot of skin — his back, his armpits, and so on.

“Mmm. Truly, you are adorable in this form. You should never leave it, if you ask me.”

“Well I’m not, so shut it. Let’s get this over with... Please, big brother.”

“No! Do it once more, with feeling! I have never heard such a deadpan line before!” A loud cracking sound resounded right next to Keima’s face.

“G-Gyah?!” It was the sonic boom of Core 219’s rose vine whip snapping the air. Yes, literally the explosive sound that occurred when something surpassed the speed of light. The whip didn’t hit him directly, but the sound and pressure was enough to send Keima shaking.

“What’s wrong, Keima?! You were more of a little sister the last time we met!”

“Wh-When was that?!”

“When you threatened me with the weed killer, of course.” Core 219 was very much meticulous when it came to acting, and she could resist Keima’s Succubus charms. In other words, she would never be satisfied if he just half-assed it and tried to make his charm do all the work.

“Now, once more!” Core 219 cracked her whip again, licking the side of Keima’s ear with it. Tears welled in his eyes. Perhaps when in Succubus form his tear ducts loosened up.

“Yes, those are the eyes! The beautiful wet eyes of a tearful young beauty! This is the stuff!”

“G-Gah! I just gotta do it, right?! Alright! You better keep your promise!”

“Hah. Have I ever broken a promise before?”

“I barely know you, that doesn’t mean anything to me!”

“Ahaha, I suppose that means you want to spend even more time with me, hm?”

“Big brother, please...”

“Yees, yes! Good, Keima! Now give a smile!”

“T-Teehee!”

“Hrm, your lips are twitching a bit, but that’s little sister-like, so I will forgive it.”

Thirty minutes passed since the acting lessons began. Keima’s talent grew, and Core 219 swung her whip less often.

“Are they twitching that much...? I mean, I can feel it, but.”

“They are. Take a look.” Core 219 showed the monitor she was looking at. On it was Keima from Core 219’s perspective. This was the first time he was seeing his Succubus form from this angle. He had looked at himself in a mirror before, though.

“Wha?! Are you filming this?!”

“Of course I am. Or are you saying that you live your life without being consciously aware of those watching you?”

“Most people aren’t!” So he said, but the Core in front of him was far from most people. She was the kind of person who would play background music for dramatic effect and make flowers sprout wherever she walked.

“Hah! You should hone your focus, Keima. Feel the eyes on you more and hone your beauty. This marvelous form of yours has potential, and if you dedicate yourself it would not be unreasonable for you to one day be the star of the imperial capital’s theater scene. Humans wouldn’t be able to resist your Succubus charms at all. Follow me, and I will make you shine.”

“Hell no!”

(whip crack) “Bzrt! Tone! Be cuter!”

“Don’t wanna!”

“Yes, that’s it! Be sweeter! More delicate!”

“Th-That’s just embarrassing!”

“Embarrassment is important. Cherish those feelings of yours. Nooow, time for you to pose. Lay on your side.” Core 219 laid out a sheet on top of soft grass, and Succubus Keima got onto it.

“Mm, yes, I will use this as a reference for later. Now, please continue.”

“W-Wait, are you still filming this?”

“Is it wrong to preserve something beautiful forever? There is no need for you to be embarrassed, I am not filming your naked form or anything of the like. You are beautiful as you are. Oh no, I’m bleeding from the nose.” Despite likely being a plant-type Core, her nose was red. Maybe that was due to her human morph.

“...Brother, pweaaaaase...?”

“Perfect! Very well! Your brother will grant your request, dear!”

Then, not too long after Core 219 approved of Keima’s acting.

“By the way, I can see your cute flat chest.”

“Kyaaah?! G-Geez, you pervert!” Keima hid his chest. Reminder: *his* chest.

“Hahaha, forgive me. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I must be off to grant your wish...!” Core 219 wiped away her nosebleed while acting cool. Reminder: *her* nosebleed.

“...Nffmmm... Nmmm, M-Masteeer.... Nnnfff...” Niku, who had been resting in the corner, was overwhelmed by Succubus Keima’s seductive presence. She furtively wiggled in the corner, doing *something*.

Sergeant Kinue and the Silky Squad

Silkies were surprisingly harsh when it came to hierarchies. They maintained an iron stratification of status, with the patriarch at the top — in this case, Keima — wielding absolute power. The Silkies in the inn embodied this concept. Allow me to introduce you to how they trained.

The scene is the hallway of the employee dorm attached to the

Dancing Doll Inn. There stood the Silkies.

"You must only speak when spoken to. Consult the head maid, me, before speaking to a customer. Do you understand, maggots?"

"Ma'am yes ma'am!"

Kinue was the head maid, whereas Hanna, Nicole, and Pio were trainees. Kinue nodded and continued.

"If you dirty sows survive my training, you will each become a maid. Furniture that exists to keep the house orderly and clean. But until that day, you are pukes. You have less worth than an old rag." Kinue walked in front of the three lined-up Silkies, her shoes clacking against the wooden floor. "You may hate me for being this harsh. But the more you hate me, the more you will learn. I am harsh, but fair. There is no racial bigotry here. I do not look down upon Vampires, Apprentice Witches, or humans. Here, you are all equally worthless!" Kinue turned to glare at all three of them. "My orders are to weed out all non-hackers who do not pack the gear to serve in my beloved inn. Do you maggots understand that?!"

"Ma'am yes ma'am!" They all saluted at once. Their organization was perfect. Which allowed for Kinue to soften her razor-sharp expression and let out a small sigh.

"...Hanna. Is this really necessary?"

"Ma'am yes ma'am! It's necessary!"

"I would rather train you all in a more relaxed fashion, Nicole."

"Ma'am no ma'am! A firm hierarchy is the Silky way!"

"I've never heard of that before? Have you, Pio?"

"Ma'am, it's all about the fun."

What's fun about this? And yes, the harsh training was requested by the three young Silkies. From her perspective, Kinue was more their older sister than their head maid. They had asked her to train them, and then handed her a script to read from.

Indeed, everything prior to now had been scripted. Basically a play with everyone acting. An iron hierarchy? That didn't exist. Kinue was technically their boss, but everyone shared the same door. At most, Keima and Rokuko's orders were absolute, but everything else was as lax as could be.

"Still, where did you three get this script?"

"Master and Ichika wrote it for us!"

It seemed that he had referenced a military story from his original home. *Perhaps I should advise him that this kind of philosophy is actually destructive*, thought Kinue while looking at the script.

"You know, I would rather not say embarrassing lines like this."

"Wha? Which lines...? Aaah, these are definitely a bit too dirty for you. I would expect nothing less from lines picked by Instructor Ichika."

“Oh well. I guess we’ll have to cut them all and skip straight to the ending...”

“Wait. I actually want her to say them now. Be brave, brave!”

Excluding that last person, they all agreed to cut most of the training scenes and insulting rants out of the script, thereby skipping straight to the line. It happened smoothly, like they were sweeping away the dirty lines.

Kinue marched back and forth in front of the three Silkies. The sharp sound of her footsteps actually had a gentle tone to them.

“...Today, you graduate from being maggots. You are now true Silkies, bound by the bonds of maidhood. Until the day you die and return to DP, you will be the Silkies Sisters no matter where you might work.”

“Ma’am yes ma’am!”

Though really, you’ve been the Silkies from the start, regardless of any training, thought Kinue as she continued. “Most of your work will be cleaning. Some of you will assist in cooking. But there is one thing you must never forget. Silkies are house fairies. We exist for the house. But we are fairies. In short — We can do chores for the rest of time!”

“Ma’am yes ma’aaaam!”

Kinue couldn’t help but tilt her head in confusion at how emotional the three Silkies were getting. All the training scenes had been skipped, so their actual training would be coming up later. Well, maybe this would encourage them to take their training more seriously, at least?

“Oh, wait, you two. There’s another scene after this, and it’s actually us killing our sergeant.”

“Wha?!”

“Hmmm? You three, killing me?” Kinue glanced at the script and saw that there was indeed a recruit who killed the sergeant and then himself. Was this script really based on real life military instruction? It was a bit serious for playacting.

“...Let’s cut that part too!” said the three Silkies in unison.

“Haaah. Well, anyway. Let’s begin your training soon. I’ll teach you how to cook.”

“Okaaay.”

By the way, there was another scene after where they all went to fight in the dungeon after saying the line “Whoever runs away is a goblin! Whoever doesn’t run away is a well-trained goblin!”, but they were all so satisfied they didn’t bother.

Isam’s Tricks: Cooking Edition

“Keima, duel me with food and free Ichika if I win!”

Isam came shouting at me once I left the church after mass. *Another duel, huh?* I'm mainly impressed he waited outside the church until mass ended. He's kinda like a loyal dog or something... But anyway.

"Are you an idiot? Why have a duel with food of all things?" I asked, and Isam snorted with a sneer.

"Heh. Think about it. Ichika loves good food, right? Which means..."

Isam placed a plate piled with food in front of Ichika. It was food more delicious than anything she had ever eaten before. It was like a mountain of the world's greatest delicacies, and Ichika was stuffing her face with it all.

"SOOOOO GOOOOOOOD!" The food was so delicious that Ichika unlocked the {Reaction} skill. Light beamed from her eyes and mouth as she shoveled it down her throat. The plate was soon empty, licked clean to a shine.

"That was the best food I've like, ever had! I was friggin' born to eat this stuff! I'll do anything if I get to keep on eating all this!"

"Yeah, sure. I'll keep making all this amazing food for you to eat, now and forever. So, Ichika, become my woman!"

"Kay! I love you!"

There appeared Keima. He took a bite of Isam's incredible food. "This is... Ngh, it's so tasty! I had no idea you had this kind of cooking genius hidden inside of you. I'm impressed. Ichika — No, Sorin is yours...!"

"And that's what'll happen, for sure." And... It actually did. Partly, kinda.

"Wow, you really captured Ichika there. She totally would do that."

"Right?! And that's why we gotta duel with food. We meet at noon tomorrow! Just sit and wait... I'll be back!"

"I dunno... Hey, hold on!" Isam walked off before I could reply. I hadn't agreed yet, but as always he was ignoring stuff like what I would get if I won. *Well, that's fine. I kinda feel like we're bros now that I know he has a smell fetish. I'll be nice and play along sometimes.*

"So basically, Ichika, there's gonna be a cooking duel tomorrow. I'm sure you don't mind being the judge." Yeah, I ultimately decided to go through with it.

"Whaaa?! Dude, that sounds like the bomb! Heck yeah, time to make some money! Time for the return of Bookmaker Ichika!"

"Aaah, hold on, hold on. I'm gonna have someone fight in my

place.”

“Wha? You’re not gonna cook yourself?”

“I mean, how could I not have Kinue do the cooking?”

“...Ah. Yeah, this match’s dead in the water. No point in even trying to gamble.” Ichika walked back on the spot. *Yeah, good call. Isam has even less of a chance of winning than he did when fighting me.*

“Also, I don’t really want to make it a big thing this time. Try not to cause too much of a stir.

“Awww. Why not? Tch, and this was my chance to wear that sweet-ass dress again.”

“You want to wear it that much?”

“I mean, dude, I am a girl. Sometimes I just wanna kick back in a hella nice dress. Which do you like better, Master, me in this outfit or me in the dress?”

That was kind of a difficult question. “...I mean, you’re Ichika no matter what you’re wearing. The person wearing the dress is more important to me than the dress.”

“Uh, do you mean that in a good way or a bad way?”

“No comment.”

“You better tell meeee! Or I’ll cook up a knuckle sandwich for ya!”

“Are you forgetting that you’re a slave again? Not that I mind, but...”

“Weeeell... Sometimes it’s easy to forget, y’know?” *I think only you would forget that, Ichika.*

And so, tomorrow came. Isam strutted up to the inn’s cafeteria.

“I’m here! Time to duel, Keima!”

“Hold up. We’re busy right now with the lunch rush. Come back later,” I told him while munching on lunch at the counter.

“...Looks like you’re just eating lunch to me. You’ve got a lotta nerve considering our duel’s coming up!”

“Yeah, it’s not me that’s busy. Kinue’s gonna represent me and she’s busy at work.”

“Wha?! Th-That’s not fair! I didn’t say you could let anyone take your place!”

“Alright then, can you cook? Good enough to impress Ichika, that is.”

“...Fine, I’ll accept it. But I’m gonna go get a chef of my own!”

Not surprising. I had asked Ichika ahead of time, and apparently the most Isam could cook was meat on a skewer above fire. Or at least, that was all he could do when they were in a party together. Ichika and Mimiko always took care of cooking duty themselves. Dunno why he would challenge anyone to a food duel with that in mind, but whatever.

Eventually, Isam came back.

“Welcome back.”

“Sorry, looks like I’m gonna need some extra time too. Mimiko’s in the middle of work.”

“Yeah, I know. She’s working as receptionist today. Here, sit and have some fried rice, totally on me.”

“Sure, thanks.” Isam sat next to me. A plate of fried rice was put in front of him within the span of a second. “That was... fast.”

“Chef Kinue is the pride and joy of our inn. Her skill lets her cook that fast. But anyway, have a bite. It’s pretty good.”

“Alright.” Isam scooped up some fried rice and took a bite.

“...Actually, did I lose this duel the second I let you use a representative? You’re gonna have her fight in your place, right? I can already tell she’s insanely good.”

“Sure, but I’m the one who taught Kinue how to cook. Didn’t feel like cooking for myself every day.”

“Say... what...?”

I hadn’t lied. I did teach her the recipes. (I never said I cooked the recipes myself.)

“Between you and me, I was the head chef of this inn before I hired Kinue.”

“Say... what...?!”

I hadn’t lied. Since I bought all the food with DP, I was basically the head chef. (I never said I cooked the food myself.)

“Anyway, I’m hype for this duel. What’ll you give me if I win? Maybe I’ll make you bark like a dog for a bit.”

“...Ngh! You were plotting this the whole time!”

“Nah, you ran headfirst into this wall yourself. I just didn’t stop you.”

The cooking duel was canceled. As an aside, Ichika beat the crap out of Isam for getting her hopes up and leaving her hungry, but that honestly wasn’t my fault.









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by Supana Onikage

Translated by Quof
Edited by K. “Kitty-tama” Jordan

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